





✓ Max Graf.  
Dec. 1951

# OPERA

*for the people*

by HERBERT GRAF

STAGE DIRECTOR, METROPOLITAN OPERA

THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA PRESS · MINNEAPOLIS

*London, Geoffrey Cumberlege, Oxford University Press*

Tac 1229

COPYRIGHT 1951 BY THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form without the written permission of the publisher. Permission is hereby granted to reviewers to quote brief passages in a review to be printed in a magazine or newspaper.

PRINTED AT THE COLWELL PRESS, INC., MINNEAPOLIS



The quotations from *Carmen Jones* by Oscar Hammerstein II appearing on pages 50 and 59 are reprinted from that book by permission of Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. Copyright 1943, 1945 by Dorothy B. Hammerstein and 1943 by Williamson Music, Inc.

The quotation from *Jack and the Beanstalk* by John Erskine appearing on page 142 is reprinted by permission of the Bobbs-Merrill Company, publisher. Copyright 1931 by John Erskine.



2072169

# Preface

**THIS BOOK** is written out of a firm faith in a great art and a great people, in the conviction that they belong together, and in the wish to further the process of bringing them together.

The *idea* of the book grew out of discussions with opera lovers, professionals and amateurs, young and old, all over the country.

Its *realization* I owe to the University of Minnesota, whose officials, after guest performances of the Metropolitan Opera on the university campus and a convocation lecture given by me before its students, expressed the wish to help bring the subject of these discussions—new and indigenous ways of operatic production—into book form.

Its *material* comes from two principal sources: first, my own practical experience during twenty-five years in the operatic field, the last sixteen of them in America, including work as stage director with many leading opera companies, in television and on film, and as teacher and lecturer; and second, the information furnished me by various operatic groups and schools about their ideas and methods of performance.



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

The *aim* of the book is to offer from this material sufficient facts and suggestions to stimulate further thinking about the production of opera in America, an immensely fertile and rapidly growing activity, and thus to contribute to the progress of opera as an integral part of the life of the American community.

I wish to thank all those managers, artists, institutions, and publishers who have so generously responded to my request for information and illustrations, and I apologize if I was not able to make full use of their contributions.

I am deeply grateful to Malcolm M. Willey, vice-president in charge of academic administration of the University of Minnesota, and to Helen Clapesattle, editor of its Press, for their constant encouragement and guidance; to the University of Minnesota's Committee on Regional Writing and its Department of Concerts and Lectures for grants-in-aid that made it possible for me to have some months free of other duties for assembling the material and writing it up; to the management of the Metropolitan Opera and Mrs. John DeWitt Peltz, editor of *Opera News*, for valuable information; to Margaret Laughlin, Louis Snyder, and many other friends for their active assistance; and last but not least, to Ruth Sandholm for her unrelenting enthusiasm and help in preparing the manuscript.

HERBERT GRAF

*Bedford, New York*

*January 1951*

# *Contents*

OPERA WITHOUT TOP HAT	3
-----------------------	---

## **PART ONE • OPERA IN PRODUCTION**

THE BOOK	19
THE MUSIC	33
OPERA IN ENGLISH	45
THE SPONSORSHIP OF OPERA	61
FROM REHEARSAL TO CURTAIN	79
BUILDINGS FOR THE OPERA	111
TRAINING THE ARTISTS	122

## **PART TWO • AMERICAN OPERA IN THE MAKING**

OPERA ON BROADWAY	133
-------------------	-----



## **OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE**

**COMMUNITY OPERA** 151

**OPERA IN THE SCHOOLS** 187

**OPERA IN MOTION PICTURES** 207

**OPERA IN TELEVISION** 219

## **PART THREE • BLUEPRINT FOR THE FUTURE**

**TOWARD A PEOPLE'S OPERA** 235

**PATTERNS FOR A PEOPLE'S OPERA** 245

**POSTSCRIPT** 266

**NOTES** 271

**INDEX** 276

# Plates

## BETWEEN PAGES 82 AND 83

1. The royal box of the Teatro San Carlo in Naples
2. The intimate Theater an der Wien
3. The auditorium of La Scala in Milan
4. The auditorium of the Metropolitan Opera House in New York
5. Wagner's plan for the auditorium of the Festival Theatre in Bayreuth
6. The auditorium of the Teatro Comunale (Politeama) in Florence
7. The auditorium of the War Memorial Opera House in San Francisco
8. The auditorium of the Civic Opera House in Chicago
9. The auditorium of the University of Indiana
10. The Boboli Gardens, Florence
11. The Hollywood Bowl
12. Giuseppe Galli-Bibbiena, baroque scenery
13. Karl Friedrich Schinkel, scenic design for *The Magic Flute*



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

14. A. Brioschi, scenic design for *Tannhäuser*
15. Angelo Parravicini, scenic design for *Aïda*
16. Matislav Dobujinsky, scenic design for *The Masked Ball*
17. Armando Agnini and Eugene B. Dunkel, scenic design for *La Gioconda*
18. Adolphe Appia, scenic design for *Lohengrin*
19. Ludwig Sievert, scenic design for *Salome*
20. Panos Aravantinos, scenic design for *Wozzeck*
21. Nicola Benois, scenic design for *Mosé*
22. Pietro Aschieri, scenic design for *Mosé*
23. C. E. Oppo, scenic design for *Rigoletto*
24. Giorgio de Chirico, scenic design for Monteverdi's *Orfeo*
25. Salvador Dali, scenic design for *Salome*
26. Joseph Urban, scenic design for *Parsifal*
27. Harry Horner, scenic design for *Fidelio*
28. Jonel Jorgulesco, scenic design for *The Marriage of Figaro*
29. Richard Rychtarik, scenic design for *Alceste*
30. Lee Simonson, scenic design for *Das Rheingold*
31. Krehan-Crayon, scenic design for *Manon Lescaut*
32. Rolf Gerard, scenic design for *Don Carlo*
33. Norman Bel Geddes, scenic design for *Pelléas and Melisande*
34. Jo Mielziner, scenic design for *Emperor Jones*
35. Donald Oenslager, scenic design for *Fidelio*
36. Robert Edmond Jones, scenic design for Gluck's *Orfeo*
37. Robert Edmond Jones, scenic design for *The Flying Dutchman*
38. Max Brückner, scenery for *Die Götterdämmerung*, Bayreuth
39. Adolphe Appia, scenery for *Die Götterdämmerung*, Bayreuth
40. Emil Preetorius, scenery for *Die Götterdämmerung*, Bayreuth

## PLATES

41. Carlo Ferrario, scenery for *La Forza del Destino*, La Scala
42. Nicola Benois, scenery for *La Forza del Destino*, La Scala
43. Richard Rychtarik, ground plan of set for *The Magic Flute*
44. Richard Rychtarik, scale drawing of set for *The Magic Flute*
45. Herbert Graf, director's score for *The Magic Flute*
46. The first Rhine-daughters, Bayreuth, 1876
47. The flower maidens in *Parsifal*, 1920
48. Lily Pons as the Daughter of the Regiment
49. Ezio Pinza as Don Giovanni
50. *The Rape of Lucretia* by the English Opera Group at Glyndebourne
51. Miguel Bernal's *Tata Vasco* by the Opera de Bellas Artes in Mexico City

## BETWEEN PAGES 178 AND 179

52. George Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* on Broadway
53. Oscar Hammerstein's *Carmen Jones* on Broadway
54. Gian-Carlo Menotti's *The Medium* on Broadway
55. Kurt Weill's *Street Scene* on Broadway
56. *Carmen* in Flint, Michigan
57. *Samson and Delilah* by the New Orleans Opera Association
58. *Fra Diavolo* by the Chautauqua Opera Association
59. *Aïda* by the Pittsburgh Opera
60. *Turandot* by the New York City Opera Company
61. *Die Meistersinger* by the New York City Opera Company
62. *La Bohème* by the American Opera Company, Philadelphia
63. *Albert Herring* by the New England Opera Theater, Boston
64. *Down in the Valley* by the Lemonade Opera Company, New York
65. *The Abduction from the Seraglio* by the Guild Opera Company, Los Angeles



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

66. *Madame Butterfly* at the Central City Opera Festival
67. *The Medium* by the Karamu House Lyric Theatre, Cleveland
68. *Peter Grimes* at Stanford University
69. *Madame Butterfly* at Fisk University
70. *The Mother of Us All* at the University of Denver
71. *Dido and Aeneas* at the University of Washington
72. *Ariadne auf Naxos* at the University of Southern California
73. *The Beggar's Opera* (Britten) at the University of California at Los Angeles
74. *Giants in the Earth* at Columbia University
75. *Parsifal* at the University of Indiana
76. *Peter Grimes* at the Berkshire Music Center
77. *The Beggar's Opera* (Britten) at the Juilliard Opera Theater in New York
78. *Carmen* by the All Children's Grand Opera in Chicago
79. *Hänsel and Gretel* by the students of McDonough High School in New Orleans

## BETWEEN PAGES 242 AND 243

80. Grace Moore as Madame Butterfly in *One Night of Love*
81. *La Traviata* on film as *The Lost One*
82. *Faust* as a motion picture
83. Italo Tajo as Mephistopheles in *Faust* on film
84. *The Barber of Seville* as a motion picture
85. *Il Trovatore* as a motion picture
86. A telecast scene from *Hänsel and Gretel*
87. *La Traviata* in television, ground plan of seven sets
88. *La Traviata* in television, isometric perspective, first half
89. *La Traviata* in television, isometric perspective, second half
90. A telecast scene from *La Bohème*

## PLATES

91. A telecast scene from *Madame Butterfly*
92. The proposed Los Angeles Music Center, main stage block
93. Frank Lloyd Wright's model for the New Theatre in Hartford, Connecticut
94. The proposed Shapiro Memorial Art Theater at Brandeis University
95. The auditorium of the City Theater in Malmö, Sweden
96. Two theater projects by Norman Bel Geddes
97. Plan for a modern Community Music Center
98. Julio Prieto's revolving stage set for *Faust*
99. Ludwig Sievert's revolving stage set for *The Abduction from the Seraglio*
100. Wagon and elevator stages
101. Caspar Neher's projected scenery for Verdi's *Macbeth*
102. Paul Planer's projected scenery for *Das Rheingold*
103. Red Rocks Theater near Denver, Colorado
104. Sesquicentennial Amphitheater, Washington, D.C.





## **OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE**





# OPERA

## *without top hat*

**WORLD WAR II** was over. The first atomic bomb seemed to have brought the fighting to an end. While the iron curtain descended, the political and artistic frontiers between America and western Europe were reopened, and the ocean crossing which before the war had been particularly familiar in the world of musicians began again.

This time, though, it was of a different kind. Before 1939 it had moved mainly in one direction, from Europe to America, but now American artists in great numbers, as well as Europeans who had found refuge in America and become American citizens, traveled eastward to visit war-devastated Europe.

They carried to musical circles in Europe the news that during recent years America had come of age not only politically, but also in music. While before the war the great transatlantic nation had, for the most part, relied on the import of musicians from Europe, during the war years it had developed many fine musicians of its own. And in the field of opera, the most conservative of all musical arts, indigenous attempts had come to the fore. New artists had taken their



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

place as equals to European artists at home and were soon to demand attention abroad.

I was among those European-bound travelers and shared their experiences when I returned to my native Vienna for a visit with my mother in the spring of 1946. What used to be the faraway Old World, separated from the New by a trip of more than one week, had become merely an overnight flight on a Pan-American plane. There was still the same Hotel Bristol standing at Vienna's most fashionable street corner, but now it was used by the American Army, and I stayed there as a guest of the United States Information Service branch.

Never will I forget the ghastly experience of looking out the window of my hotel room and seeing the ruins of the famous opera house. Through the huge holes in its bomb-shattered walls one could see the rubble remains of what had been one of the most beautiful auditoriums in the world—a symbol of Europe's musical culture trampled by the evil forces of Hitlerism.

My sadness at the sight of these ruins was deepened by unforgettable memories of my youth. I saw myself night after night, in the company of dozens of my fellow students, storming up the staircase to the "Fourth Gallery," after hours of waiting in line spent in heated debates. In the gallery we occupied standing room, or, more often, sat on the steps, studying the opera scores while we listened to great performances under the direction of Franz Schalk and Richard Strauss.

I was fortunate then in still being able to hear the great singers of the Gustav Mahler period, artists like Richard Mayr, Eric Schmedes, and Gutheil-Schoder, who did not sing for the sole sake of brilliant vocal effects but devoted all their great gifts to the task of dramatically true interpretations. We heard also the singers of the following generation, like Maria Jeritza and Lotte Lehmann, in performances of the highest ensemble art.

This simple and noble opera house, which had perfect acoustics, had at first been generously supported as the Imperial and Royal Court Opera by the emperor, and when the monarchy came to an end, following World War I in 1918, this tradition of government support was taken over by the republic and the institution became the State Opera. As before, its company played in Vienna during a season of ten and a half months, then most of its personnel moved to Salzburg for the

## WITHOUT TOP HAT

Summer Festival. This meant a year-round, permanent engagement for its employees, with state pensions guaranteed for their old age.

In addition, Vienna had a second opera house, the Folk Opera, which was supported by the city. In 1932 Vienna's two opera houses received government subsidies amounting to one million dollars. Opera was a truly organic part of the cultural life and musical tradition that pervaded the entire city.

My own home and education might serve as an example of this living tradition. My father, a Viennese musicologist and critic of great repute, had been a pupil of the composer Bruckner and the music critic Hanslick (the original model for Wagner's Beckmesser); he knew Brahms and Hugo Wolf and was a friend of Gustav Mahler and Richard Strauss. My teachers at the Academy of Music were Guido Adler, who had known Wagner, and Alfred Roller, who did the stage designs for Mahler's revolutionary operatic productions. The Academy, too, was supported by the state and was closely connected with the opera. In fact, the leading conductors of the State Opera, men like Franz Schalk, Clemens Krauss, and Karl Alwin, were also the directors of the Academy, and the chief stage director of the opera, Josef Turnau, also staged our student opera performances.

But Vienna was an old city, aware of its past, witty and skeptical, of refined taste and tired nerves. It was not just coincidence that Schoenberg's theories of the dissolution of classic music harmony stemmed from Vienna, or that there we met Sigmund Freud, who discovered the secrets of the subconscious. This was a great place for learning, but it was too conservative to offer practical opportunities to beginners.

To gain stage experience the young operatic artists had to look elsewhere, and they found ample chances for employment in the numerous government-supported theaters in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and Czechoslovakia, where opera was sung in the German language. In 1931 there were ninety-seven theaters in these countries which gave opera, twenty-five of them devoted exclusively to opera, seventy-two to opera along with drama and operetta. At that time, German governments were paying 40,000,000 marks (\$10,000,000) annually in subsidies to their opera theaters.

Like hundreds of other musical artists, I found it easy to obtain



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

practical training, beginning on a small stage in Münster in Westphalia where operas, plays, and operettas were performed, and gradually advancing to the bigger legitimate opera houses in Breslau and Frankfurt-am-Main. In these theaters I had the opportunity of staging an average of ten operas each season in new productions—often, I confess, too new; Wagner might forgive me for staging *Lohengrin* without his swan! And all these opera stages were competing for the performance of new operas by Richard Strauss, Stravinsky, Schoenberg, Hindemith, Weill, Alban Berg, and Krenek.

Opera in Europe, scion of kings and aristocracy, had become a vital part of the modern community, and this fact was recognized in the financial support provided by the state or municipal governments. Local companies, being assured of their existence, with seasons extending from nine to eleven months, with a permanent full-time ensemble and technical staff, including the necessary electricians, stagehands, and the like, could afford and handle a repertoire of old and modern works. These were given in the language of the audience, in new productions, and on stages with modern technical equipment. The great number of operatic companies offered valuable opportunities for the practical training of young artists. Thus, opera in Europe, because of its historical tradition, was an organic and well-established civic project.

How different the situation of opera in America was, it took me many years of practical trial and error to realize.

In August 1934 I arrived in New York with an Arthur Judson contract in my pocket to stage the first season of opera to be given by the Philadelphia Orchestra Association. I had been in New York for a short visit during the summer of 1930 and had marveled at the wonders of America. What could be more desirable for a young stage director who had experimented on new opera productions in pre-Hitler Europe for nine years, than this highly interesting opportunity to put his experience to work in a big city of the fabulous New World?

The plan was to put on a season of ten modern productions, some of them in English, with singers individually chosen for their parts according to voice and acting ability, with new scenery and costumes by leading Broadway designers, a young chorus, and three weeks of stage rehearsals for each opera—all this with the entire Philadelphia Orchestra under Fritz Reiner and Alexander Smallens.

## WITHOUT TOP HAT

In staging these operas I was expected to depart from the traditional style of the Metropolitan, which was not to give its usual guest performances in Philadelphia that year. The idea of this season was "to seek to create a distinctively American operatic style." So, while the press skeptically wrote, "Graf plans a New Deal for operas," I plunged into the challenging task.

At the time of my arrival Judson was on vacation, Reiner was conducting somewhere in California, and Smallens was undiscoverable. In the office of the Philadelphia Orchestra I found a secretary who was eager to help me, but who confessed that since this was the first time the Orchestra Association had given opera under its own sponsorship, she had little experience in the problems involved. However, she said, I would probably find out more at the theater.

I went to the stage door of the famous Academy of Music. It was closed. When I had located the superintendent, he led me to the stage, which rested in complete darkness with the asbestos curtain down. And my guide assured me there was no chance that the fire police would raise that curtain before the first of October, when the concert rehearsals under Stokowski were to start. Because, he informed me, the theater did not belong to the Orchestra Association and was only rented to the orchestra during its regular season. I was amazed. In Europe I had never heard of a leading opera company that did not own its building.

Next I learned that there were at hand neither the "heads" of the carpentry, electricity, and property departments, nor any stagehands, and since there was no technical director such as I was used to in any European opera house, it was up to me as stage director to engage the technical personnel. Somewhat bewildered, I went back to the office. The secretary wired Judson and the answer came back promptly: "Of course Graf must engage the crew."

Since I happened to know the chief electrician at Radio City, I went to New York to ask his advice, and he was helpful in recommending a chief electrician and a chief carpenter, the best people he knew in the field. Relieved, I returned to Philadelphia—only to find it was all in vain. Because, first, no stage technicians could be engaged except members of the union in Philadelphia, and second, even if I found some there, I still could not hire them because no basic contract had been signed between the Orchestra Association and the union.



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

Another wire went to Judson and another wire came back: I was to negotiate such a contract. So a meeting with the union leaders was arranged. I still don't know whether to consider it fortunate or unfortunate that my English was so poor at that time that no agreement was reached. In any case, Judson returned and the contract was eventually signed.

Its terms were appalling to me. A minimum number of stage personnel had to be engaged for the entire season of thirty weeks. Their regular working period was to end at 4:30 P.M., and everything after that was to be paid for as overtime, with double pay on Sundays. The rub in this lay in the fact that the chorus consisted of amateurs who were busy with their regular professions during the day and could rehearse only evenings or on Sundays. And since the Academy was rented for other uses on most evenings, nearly all our rehearsals had to be held on Sundays at double pay. Since we were to give only three performances of each opera, one opera every third week, we felt dizzy about the financial outlook, but all we could do under the circumstances was go ahead, and pray.

The first performance was to be *Tristan*. The scenery for it was to be definitely new and different, so a famous "name" artist, the sculptor Archipenko, had been engaged to design it. I had heard that it was difficult to find designers for opera in America, because, although there were excellent scenic artists working in the legitimate theater, they lacked the particular stylistic knowledge and experience that opera requires.

When the stage model for Act I arrived, it was of beautiful form and color. It showed the ship not in cross section as usual, but in longitudinal section. This was certainly different, and very interesting, but the cabin, in which practically the whole of Act I takes place, was allotted only about one quarter of the width of the stage and was roped off toward the audience. This allowed too little space for the actors.

In the end we had to discard this impractical plan and used instead Donald Oenslager's designs, which were conceived in a modern though less provocative style. The singers for the two leading parts were brought from Germany and chosen not alone for their voices, but also for physique and acting abilities. Great care was taken with the lighting and new costuming was provided according to a unified scheme of color and design.

## WITHOUT TOP HAT

The production was greeted with unqualified enthusiasm for its orchestral performance, although its length seemed to have strained the listeners. It was the first time *Tristan* had been given in America without cuts, and I heard one gentleman ask as he left the theater, "Is Roosevelt still president?"

The scenic side of the performance, however, met with sharp criticism, and except for the enthusiastic voice of Lawrence Gilman, there was little doubt that the traditional staging was preferred to this new version.

Next came a production of *Carmen* in which eleven scenes were mounted on a revolving table. This device, used also for the third act of *Der Rosenkavalier*, was criticized by the press, but approved by the composer and the incomparable singer of the Marschallin, Lotte Lehmann. For the first American performance of Gluck's *Iphigenia in Aulis*, Norman Bel Geddes created a beautiful neoclassic set and extraordinary lighting. Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro* and Verdi's *Falstaff* were performed in new English translations, with mostly young American singers and after many weeks of rehearsals. Stravinsky's *Mavra* was given for the first time in America.

In short, no effort was spared in tackling the problems of operatic production; in addition to the best orchestra any opera could hope for, we had an interesting repertoire, real ensemble, good acting, new scenery and costumes, up-to-date lighting, new artists, and opera sung in English.

The result? Although the public had shown its interest by excellent attendance, the season ended with a huge deficit.

How could it have been otherwise? The organization had no control over the use of the theater and very little over the time of the chorus, so that the expenses of rehearsals became prohibitive. And the purchase of new scenery and costumes for the ten operas, as well as of the permanent equipment such as the revolving table and curtains, all had to be charged against the budget of one season.

So Judson resigned and the Orchestra Association decided against another season of opera. Since the association did not own a storehouse, the expensive new scenery soon deteriorated. Philadelphia's attempt to have opera of its own, like a good many similar attempts, had failed. The following year the Metropolitan Opera returned to Philadelphia for a short season of guest performances.

## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

With many others I now found myself out of work, which was a new experience for me. In Europe it had always been easy for an operatic artist to find an engagement on one of the numerous stages, but when the Metropolitan told my manager there was no chance for me there at that time, it practically meant the end of the possibilities as stage director in this country, at least for the time being.

Fortunately, I had good luck, one of the indispensable elements in any artist's career. Bruno Walter, who was conducting concerts with the Philharmonic Orchestra in New York at that time, took me to the May Festival in Florence, Italy, to stage Mozart's *Abduction from the Seraglio*, and this production was taken to the Salzburg Festival that same summer.

Then came a series of engagements: Furtwaengler employed me for my first work in Vienna, a production of *Tannhäuser*; Bruno Walter for a production in Paris; and Toscanini, who had shown his interest in the Philadelphia *Falstaff* and had seen the Mozart opera in Salzburg, asked me to do *Die Meistersinger* for him. Then Edward Johnson, who had become the general manager of the Metropolitan, engaged me as a stage director there. The "name" I had made in America took me to my home country and the "name" of working there carried me back to America.

It was just a year and a half after the Philadelphia season had ended that I made my debut at the "Met" with a production of *Samson and Delilah*. At that time the Met chorus consisted mostly of older members with fine voices but with little consideration for acting; so I spent two piano stage rehearsals arranging the chorus scenes of the first act—hardly an excessive amount of time under the circumstances. But after the second session the secretary in charge of the rehearsal department appeared to inform me that this was the last rehearsal period at my disposal, since the orchestra rehearsals were to start the next day. I protested, despaired, wanted to quit—and finally calmed down.

To my surprise, at the two orchestra rehearsals not only Act I, but also Acts II and III went along smoothly. The artists and chorus seemed to know their business well, although it was different in many ways from what I had intended to do.

The morning after the première I opened the morning papers with anxiety, as any Met debutant can understand (for while we all, of



## WITHOUT TOP HAT

course, do not care about critics, we read them). The general consensus was that my production—after the modern staging I had been responsible for in Philadelphia—was a pleasant surprise. Everything was done according to the best French traditions. If any exceptions were to be made, they concerned the chorus scenes of Act I!

I do not mean to imply that all the difficulties were the result of adverse conditions; some came from my own mistakes. For instance, when the second task was entrusted to me—a revival of Offenbach's *Tales of Hoffmann*—I was not satisfied with the available sets. I wanted the three acts of the opera, which present the three fantastic stories, to contrast in a dreamlike manner with the realistic treatment of the prologue and epilogue where Hoffmann actually tells these tales to his friends. For this purpose, I introduced a new scene in the first act, a laboratory of Spalanzani, but the effect was unfortunate because the abstract style of the new set clashed with the realistic character of the following set, Spalanzani's ballroom.

For the second act, I used a gauze curtain across the proscenium opening, but without sufficient time for new lighting, this device did not, as I intended, make Venice appear more romantic, but enveloped it in a kind of London fog.

In the third act, to create a special effect for the magic appearances of Dr. Miracle, I used luminous paint applied in a skeleton design on Lawrence Tibbett's black tights. But there was not time enough for controlling the amount of the ultraviolet spotlight needed to obtain the gruesome effect I wanted, and the result was amusement rather than the intended fear.

These mistakes resulted from my lack of experience in applying my methods under the existing conditions. Consequently, I did not achieve the effects I had in mind, and the adverse criticism I received was justified. I owe Edward Johnson a good deal of gratitude for having kept his confidence in me during these beginnings.

During the years that followed, I learned the hard way how to deal in some fashion with the problems of producing opera with solo artists who are not available for rehearsals and who bring their own costumes, which, as often as not, clash with the colors and design of the rest of the production; the handicap of casts that are constantly changing; the difficulties of obtaining good action and reactions from soloists and chorus members who do not understand the language in which they

## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

are singing; the hard task of adapting the action to existing sets or of working with designers who are not experienced in the operatic field; and the limitations that bring about most of these disadvantages, particularly the lack of rehearsals.

These conditions are the fault of neither the public nor the management. They are the product, I have come to realize, of the history of opera in America—a history which has not yet produced the organic development necessary to bridge the gap between the traditional methods of operatic production and the new, democratic American audience.

Let us review that history briefly.\*

Here, in the first decades, were simple, vigorous people, struggling to conquer the physical wilderness around them and achieve a measure of security and wealth. They were building their new world without the chains of old concepts and with pride in their personal freedom. In their minds, in their busy days, there was no place for the elaborate, glamorous entertainment of European kings and dukes, grand opera, which still bore substantial traces of its aristocratic origin. They were content with their simple folk songs, in church and home.

Later, when their material existence had been made secure and they could enjoy music in concert hall and theater, they listened to simple folk operas in English, stemming from the English ballad operas of the eighteenth century. Then, with the invention of the steamship, easier communication with Europe, and rising industrial wealth, European grand opera in its original languages was imported to serve the cultural and entertainment needs of the wealthy.

It is worth noting that opera in America during the first ninety years of its history (which began with the performance of the ballad opera *Flora, or Hob in the Well*, in Charleston, South Carolina, in 1735) existed only in the form of folk opera or European opera in English. It was not until 1825 that opera in foreign languages was brought into this country, to become, during the following hundred years, the protégé of the new society composed of the leaders in industry and finance.

Folk opera did not wither away under the greater glory of the imported brand; it lived on in ballad operas, minstrel shows, light operas,

\*The author has dealt in detail with the history and sociology of opera in his book, *The Opera and its Future in America* (New York, Norton, 1941).

## WITHOUT TOP HAT

and musical comedies, as well as in sporadic attempts to create native grand opera and in occasional efforts to give European opera in English. But in splendor of production and in social distinction, European grand opera far outshone its simpler American cousin.

After the Civil War, when new inventions and techniques paved the way for the golden age of modern industry, European grand opera in America entered its most glittering period, symbolized in the opening of the Metropolitan Opera in New York in 1883. A corporation of thirty-five wealthy shareholders and parterre-boxholders of the "Diamond Horseshoe" owned the Metropolitan as the private property and special privilege of high society, not unlike the monarchs and dukes of earlier years abroad.

This era came to an end during the years of depression following the crash of 1929. By that time grand opera in America was so geared to sponsorship by individuals of great wealth like Otto H. Kahn in New York or Samuel Insull in Chicago that when such persons could no longer support it, its continued existence was seriously endangered.

Fortunately, a new and larger audience was already in the making. Men and women of lesser means or of practically no means at all were becoming increasingly interested in good music thanks to the advent of radio. On Christmas Day in 1931 occurred the first broadcast of a Metropolitan performance, *Hänsel and Gretel*. Since that day the listening public for the Met's Saturday afternoon performances has increased to a nationwide audience which is now estimated at twelve to fourteen millions in the United States and Canada. Here is a huge democratic audience for opera that Mozart, Verdi, and Wagner could never have dreamed of.

In 1935 the Metropolitan Opera Guild was founded by Mrs. August Belmont for the purpose of developing a wider interest in opera. And in 1939, when it was announced that the original stockholders of the Metropolitan Opera and Real Estate Company were not able to continue their ownership of the Met's building, a nationwide campaign was organized to raise one million dollars to buy it from them. By the summer of 1940, 166,000 donors had contributed \$1,057,000, of which about one third came from radio listeners. The purchase of the building permitted the Metropolitan Opera Association to remain in its home and to continue operation.

This sequence of events at the Metropolitan revealed a fundamental



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

change in the operatic situation and reflected the rise of a new audience representative of the entire country and of all social classes. And the effect of this development has been felt not only by opera companies, big and small, but also on Broadway. Authors and composers like Hammerstein, Rodgers, Weill, and Menotti most successfully expanded musical plays to operatic dimensions. Numerous community opera companies and school opera groups developed. Motion pictures began to use operatic scenes. And then along came television, which has already demonstrated how immeasurably it can contribute in the future to the popularization of opera.

But this sociological change in the audience for opera will inevitably demand a change also in our artistic approach and conception. Mr. and Mrs. America have begun to go to the opera, and opera has begun to take off its top hat. But there remains still a sizable gulf between the established ways of grand opera and the expectations of the new converts.

These people have grown to love the beautiful operatic music which comes into their homes by means of radio and recordings, but they do not understand, or much like, some of the strange conventions they encounter when they go to meet their new love on the stage. They look with awe and more than a little apprehension at this adopted child of European courts who smiles and sings lovely sounds at them but whose language and behavior they do not comprehend.

They do not go to the opera for social reasons, more to be seen than to see; few of them have traveled to Europe; fewer still know foreign languages. Common sense means more to them than operatic tradition, however lofty. They have been trained by the movies to expect the illusion of truth in the theater and cannot understand why an opera singer should not look and act like any other human being on the screen or the stage, or why he should not talk to them in their own language. They cannot understand why a singer should not use his great voice as a part of the musical drama.

These people have not studied the history of grand opera; they do not know the historical reasons why opera theaters have that old-fashioned luxurious look and bad sightlines, or why the scenery waves on painted canvas pieces. They know little about the origin of opera in old European places and times when candlelight and oil lamps were used—and if they did, they would wonder why we should still be

## WITHOUT TOP HAT

bound by such conditions in this age of electricity and modern technology. Theater to them means a show produced with the use of modern stage techniques to create the sense of dramatic illusion.

That opera seems to be holding fast to its old ways in the face of this new situation is not wholly, not even primarily, the fault of conservatism on the part of its personnel and its long-time patrons. The big hurdle to its modernization is the financial one. Economic developments in America have put an end to any possibility of opera's sole dependence on private sponsorship, but there exists as yet no substitute form of civic sponsorship equivalent to the government support given to opera in Europe. Opera in America has not yet found its organic place as a civic project in the community. So nobody is paying the bill for "opera for the people" to any adequate extent.

Consequently, operatic production in America in general, measured by European standards, is suffering. The lack of subsidies is apparent everywhere in the fewness of major companies, in short seasons, in repertoires limited to the proved box-office attractions. Because the leading singers can be engaged only under short-term contracts, permanent ensembles cannot be maintained and the resort to routine is made necessary. The tight budget forces the management to keep rehearsals to a minimum and only rarely permits new productions. To these limitations can be added the lack of up-to-date theaters for opera, of modern stage equipment, of new and native operas, and of a sufficient number of smaller companies to permit the training of new operatic artists.

As soon as the new audience began to go to the opera, commercial apostles appeared promising to make opera pay its own way. But while it was easy to fill newspaper columns with criticism of the old-fashioned production standards, necessitated by the given conditions, it proved more difficult to do what no great operatic organization has ever succeeded in doing—namely, to produce grand opera in an artistic and enduring way without financial subsidy. Such prescriptions can only lead to more of the shoestring methods which have already done great harm to the artistic quality of opera and which are worthy neither of America's musical culture nor of the standards which the American people have acquired in the field of the legitimate theater and the motion picture.

America has created and maintained the greatest symphony orches-

## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

tras in the world by supporting them generously. Now that its people are clearly demonstrating their interest in opera, they will hardly deny it their assistance in becoming an art of their own. But this goal cannot be reached by mere imitation of European methods which originated in different circumstances; it can be achieved only by new ways of operatic production, developed in accord with the particular conditions opera is facing in this country.

To explore the possibilities of such American methods for producing opera is the purpose of this book. By describing and discussing the several elements that enter into an opera production, and then considering some of the indigenous attempts to modernize opera which are being undertaken all over the country, we shall search for ideas and practical methods of producing opera for the people.



## **PART ONE · OPERA IN PRODUCTION**



# *The* BOOK

**BECAUSE** grand opera is performed in America mostly in foreign languages, the American public when enjoying opera is relying primarily on its sound. Therefore, opera to its American audience is essentially a means of providing beautiful music, while the drama serves merely as a frame to make this sensual experience possible. Vocal quality and quantity, rather than their function as a means for the expression of the underlying drama, are the focal point of interest, and the meaning of the words, the acting, and the staging take a place of secondary importance. Actually, a certain exotic mystery is favored in these respects, and one frequently hears listeners say something like this: "I don't need to understand the words; I only want to enjoy the music."

To some degree, opera has always had to protect its emotional remoteness. The failures at their first performances of many operas that later became widely popular, such as *Traviata* and *Butterfly*, can be explained to a great extent by the fact that their realistic imitation of contemporary life was a shock to their listeners. The people on the stage looked as real as those in the audience, so that their continuous singing was not credible. When *Traviata* was given one year after its



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

première with its up-to-date costuming changed to that of a period a hundred years earlier, it became a success.

In America, however, conditions have intensified this reliance on an operatic dream world and it is being maintained by a number of outdated "traditions" of acting, scenery, and costumes, because of fear that if the plots were unmasked and made more intelligible, the treasured musical values might suffer. For this reason, opera in America, more than in Europe, remains "grand opera."

While this approach was understandable, perhaps, as long as an exclusive, sophisticated society was interested in the use of grand opera in its original form as a *l'art pour l'art* medium of social entertainment, such an artificial approach is not justified with the new audience, which is entirely realistic in its enjoyment of the theater. There is no longer any reason for dodging the issue of either accepting or repudiating opera for the American people in the way its great masters conceived it.

To these masters, from the Florentine "inventors" to Gluck, Wagner, and Richard Strauss, opera meant one thing: musical drama. The history of opera, of its great composers as well as its interpreters, consisted of their struggles to defend this conception of opera, and they expressed it continually, both in theory and in practice.

Monteverdi called his *Orfeo* (1607) "favola [fable] in musica," Gluck's *Orfeo* (1762) was named "dramma per musica," and Wagner's works, a hundred years later, were also called "musical dramas." Mozart's *Nozze di Figaro* (1786) was described as "commedia per musica" and "dramma giocoso," and Richard Strauss's *Rosenkavalier*, (1911) was named a "Komödie fuer Musik" (comedy for music).

Gluck declared in his famous foreword to *Alceste* (1767): "I strove to lead music back to its true task, namely to serve the poem by strengthening the expression of the feelings and the effect of the situations without interrupting the action or weakening it by superfluous ornaments." And in the essay on "Opera and Drama" Richard Wagner compressed his theory of musical drama into the formula: "THE ERROR IN THE ART-GENRE OF OPERA CONSISTS HEREIN: THAT A MEANS OF EXPRESSION (MUSIC) HAS BEEN MADE THE END, WHILE THE END OF EXPRESSION (THE DRAMA) HAS BEEN MADE A MEANS."<sup>1</sup>

Although Wagner's ideas on the "Gesamtkunstwerk" (work of the united arts) sounded new, they were only relatively so when seen from Wagner's viewpoint as reaction against the abuses in grand opera

## THE BOOK

during his time. Basically, he was only stating the same musical-dramatic concept that all great operatic composers from Monteverdi, Gluck, and Mozart to Verdi and Richard Strauss were working for each in his own way.

By keeping the dramatic idea in place as the focal point, all the elements of opera (words and music) and its performance (singing, acting, dancing, scenery, costumes, make-up, lighting, and theater-building) become functional, unified means for its expression. Opera is then true "musical drama." But if the dramatic concept is abandoned, these several elements split apart as independent, self-centered star effects created by singers, dancers, conductors, stage directors, designers, and architects. Opera then becomes "grand opera."

We may, then, properly define opera as any form of musical theater in which the use of voice and orchestra is not incidental, but of essential importance in developing the story and the characters.

The basic requirement for any opera is the *book*—the libretto. Its first task is to make the musical treatment possible, and there is, therefore, a fundamental difference between a legitimate drama and an operatic book. In a libretto the main purpose is to indicate, not the dramatic action itself, but its underlying feelings. It serves as a form of "lyric theater," in which the inner reflections, conflicts, and developments resulting from or leading to the action of the drama are to be expressed by musical means.

The operatic book is, in Wagner's definition, "the plot perceived through the eye of the music." It does not matter by which route this goal is reached: whether by Mozart's approach that "in an opera, the poetry must be, by all means, the obedient daughter of music,"<sup>2</sup> or by Wagner's theory that the music must be the servant to the drama.

Wagner himself defined his work as librettist in the "Mitteilung an meine Freunde" (Communication to my Friends): "Henceforward, with all my dramatic works, I was in the first instance *Poet*, and only in the complete working-out of the poem, did I become once more Musician. Only, I was a poet who was conscious in advance of the faculty of *musical* expression, for the working-out of his poems. This faculty I had exercised so far, that I was fully aware of my ability to employ it on the realization of a poetic aim, and not only to reckon on its help when drafting a poetic sketch, but in that knowledge to draw

## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

such sketch itself more *freely* and more in accordance with poetic necessity, than if I had designed merely with an eye to the musical effect. Before this, I had had to acquire facility of musical expression in the same manner as one learns a language."<sup>3</sup>

In order to make the musical treatment possible, the operatic book must provide, first of all, a plot that takes place in an atmosphere that motivates and justifies the emotional state of music. Plots like those of *The Magic Flute* and *Il Trovatore* offered to their composers excellent material filled with contrasting basic emotions: joy and sorrow, love and hatred, victory and defeat, the shifting moods of nature. In *The Magic Flute* we pass through the entire gamut of human feelings from fear to happiness, all woven into a dream world of magic sound and mysteries. And *Il Trovatore* deals with the passions of rival lovers in such contrasting scenes as medieval castles, gypsy camps, monastery, battlefield, and prison.

These books are often ridiculed as nonsense, but the fact that they inspired Mozart and Verdi to two of their greatest and most successful operas proves that there is a good deal of sense in them in regard to fundamental operatic qualities.

The atmosphere in which people are in such an exalted frame of mind that their constant singing becomes believable was at first found in the realms of saga, mythology, and ancient history. At all times composers have selected their plots and stories according to the particular interests of their society.

The first Florentine operas and Gluck's classic reform operas dealt with subjects like the myths in *Dafne* and *Orfeo*. The story of Orpheus, who defied death and by the power of his song and lyre conquered hell and heaven until Amor brought him the reward of reunion with Euridice, is an example of a libretto of the classic style that provided the emotional basis for musical treatment. Wagner, who lived at the time when romanticism looked back into the fountains of national history, used the rich world of medieval saga for his musical dramas. Richard Strauss ended this tradition of European baroque opera by returning to the same figure of classic mythology with which opera had started at Florence—that is, by another treatment of the Daphne story.

Opera originated, then, as aristocratic *opera seria* based on ancient gods and heroes or similar exalted subjects. Symbolic miracle effects—

## THE BOOK

such as "deus ex machina" appearances of divine powers in the air, demolitions, clouds, fire, and water—belonged to the arsenal of opera from its beginnings down to Wagner's riding Valkyries and moving scenery. Also, these effects are means of sustaining the emotional uplift necessary for continuous musical expression.

The Age of Reason brought forth another type of opera, folk opera, which dealt with simple people and happenings in their daily lives. At first this healthy new blood was present only in the simple forms of comic operas, but soon it moved also into the artificial world of grand opera and, uniting with the more elaborate forms there, created the masterworks of Mozart and Beethoven's *Fidelio*. In the nineteenth century this natural, reasonable approach grew still stronger in the realistic books of Verdi and the masters of the French *opéra comique*, and it has continued to be characteristic of the works of a great many of our modern composers.

But even in taking their plots from contemporary sources and current plays, composers still chose their subjects with an eye to the possibilities for exalted states of emotion. Mozart chose the extravagant lover Don Giovanni, had him invite the "stoneguest" to supper in a scene full of supernatural mystery, and ended the story with the infernal spirits taking Don Giovanni to his punishment. In *Fidelio* Leonore's conjugal love rises to exalted heights. Rigoletto's fatherly love is emotionally deepened by his fate as jester and appearance as hunchback.

Similarly emotional plots are provided by Traviata's illness and hectic search for pleasure and love; by the extreme passions in the natures of the Moor Otello and the glutton Falstaff; by the sentimental Bohemian world where the poet Rudolph and frail little Mimi dream their castles of love; by the hysteria of Salome and the emotions of Porgy and Bess; by the modern version of operatic madness in Menotti's *The Medium*.

From these examples we see that an operatic book can take its plot either from the fantasy world of saga and fairy tale or from realistic stories of contemporary life, such as *Figaro*, *Bohème*, and *Louise* were to their composers. But, in either case, the essential requirement for an operatic book is its ability to provide a sufficiently elevated emotional basis for the musical expression of the feelings and actions of its characters.



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

With a proper subject agreed upon, the librettist proceeds to build the structure (scenario) of the book in such a way as to enable the composer to choose and apply a variety of musical forms. These forms range from individual contemplation in solo arias to ensemble numbers combining several characters, chorus, and ballet.

An operatic book can be prepared in any one of several ways. The story can be adapted by expert operatic librettists, as was usual in French and Italian opera. Writers like Eugene Scribe (*Huguenots*), Meilhac and Halévy (*Carmen*), Barbier and Carré (*Faust, Mignon*), and Piave (*Rigoletto*) had developed a certain routine which provided the composers with the necessary musical opportunities. Or composer-poets like Richard Wagner, combining the two talents in their one person, can provide their own books. There is also the possibility of using a legitimate play and simply adding to it the lyric extensions needed to give music its place and scope.

It is interesting to watch this procedure in the case of Beaumarchais' *Le Mariage de Figaro* as it was adapted for Mozart by Da Ponte. The librettist discussed the principles which guided him at this work in the foreword to the first edition of the libretto in 1786, a copy of which is in possession of the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.

After explaining that for reasons of time, personnel, and the like he has not made a translation, but rather an imitation or "extract," Da Ponte continues: "For this reason I was compelled to reduce the sixteen parts, of which the comedy is composed, to eleven, two of which can be performed by the same person, and to omit in addition to an entire act, many very attractive scenes, and many beautiful words, and picanteries of which there is an abundance, in place of which I had to substitute songs, arias, choruses, and other ideas, and words which are easily adaptable to music, such as can be obtained only from poetry, and never from prose."

Except for these necessary eliminations dictated by the length of the play and the reduction of five acts to four, Da Ponte followed the original play closely. But through developing the sentiments of the characters, particularly in the lyric parts of the Countess, Cherubino, and Susanna, by means of arias written for this purpose and a variety of ensemble numbers (duets, trios, sextets), the librettist turned a

rather intellectual "play of intrigue," which hardly seemed to fulfill the requirements of opera, into the basis for a musical masterpiece.

In addition, Da Ponte furnished Mozart with the text for the finales of Acts II and IV. In his *Memoirs* he describes the principles for constructing an opera finale:

"The finale, besides having to be closely bound up with the rest of the opera, is a kind of little comedy or play by itself, demanding a fresh plot and some special interest. It is here chiefly that the genius of the Kapellmeister, the worth of the singers, and the greatest dramatic effect must show themselves. There is no recitative, everything is sung, and every kind of singing has to be introduced: *adagio*, *allegro*, *andante*, *amabile*, *armonioso*, *strepitoso*, *arcistrepitoso*, *strepitosissimo*, with which nearly always the finale closes. This in technical musical language is called the *chiusa*, or *stretta*, I know not whether because in it the play draws to a close, or because it generally puts the brain of the poor poet who has to write the words into such straits not once, but a hundred times. According to theatrical dogma, in the finale all the singers must appear on the stage, even if there were three hundred of them, one at a time, or two, or three, or six, or ten, or sixty at a time, to sing solos or duets or trios or sextets or sessantets. And if the plot of the play does not allow of it, then the poet must find a way to make it do so, in despite of good sense and reason and all the Aristotles on earth."<sup>4</sup>

No one will dispute that Da Ponte's finales for Acts II and IV gave Mozart the opportunity to employ his art with a creative skill never surpassed.

If the librettist is not an expert in these musical requirements, a close collaboration between writer and composer can lead to the same end. Mozart believed, "The best thing of all is when a good composer, who understands the stage and is talented enough to make sound suggestions, meets an able poet, as true phoenix; in that case no fears need be entertained as to the applause even of the ignorant."<sup>5</sup>

He proved this by his influence on the writing of his librettos. In a letter to his father about the composition of the *Abduction from the Seraglio* he wrote: "As the original text began with a monologue, I asked Herr Stephanie to make a little arietta out of it—and then to put in a duet instead of making the two chatter together after Osmin's

## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

short song. . . . At the beginning of Act III there is a charming quintet or rather finale, but I should prefer to have it at the end of Act II. In order to make this practicable, great changes must be made, in fact an entirely new plot must be introduced—and Stephanie is up to the eyes in other work.”<sup>6</sup> This suggestion from Mozart resulted in the beautiful quartet which now ends the second act.

Still greater is the influence Verdi had on the preparation of his operatic books. His letters, most valuable for understanding his demands as to all aspects of operatic performance, are also very interesting in this respect. For instance, concerning the final scene of *Aïda* he wrote at length to the librettist Ghislanzoni, not only describing the emotional tone he wanted to achieve, but even outlining the scene in dialogue, though he added, “These naturally are only words, as I have jotted them down. It is for you to make beautiful verses out of them.”<sup>7</sup>

Comparing his outline with the score, we can see how closely the librettist has followed Verdi’s suggestions and how the final book formed one organic unity with the musical ideas of the composer. Verdi’s influence was decisive, too, in shaping the book for the triumphal scene, which he planned in detail in another long letter to Ghislanzoni, adding again, “You take care of the sense and the rhyme.”<sup>8</sup>

In our time one of the most interesting insights into the delicate process of collaboration between a composer and a poet in achieving a mutually satisfactory operatic book is provided by the correspondence between Richard Strauss and Hugo v. Hofmannsthal.<sup>9</sup> Young operatic composers and librettists will find it fascinating to read the entire correspondence, which concerns the composition of various Strauss operas. Here we must be content to review the letters about Strauss’s best known opera, *Der Rosenkavalier*.

Hofmannsthal was a renowned poet but had no experience as operatic librettist. Strauss appreciated the qualities of a good play as the basis for an opera and was himself a master craftsman who knew how to guide the poet to provide the wanted musical opportunities. He had advised Hofmannsthal previously with regard to another operatic plan: “One thing I beg of you; when writing your libretto, give no thought whatever to the music—that is purely my concern. Give me a good plot with plenty of action and incidents—few mass scenes—just two or three good, ‘fat’ parts.”<sup>10</sup>

## THE BOOK

Hofmannsthal proposed writing a comedy about Casanova which he wanted first to be performed on the legitimate stage to be sure of achieving natural characterization and dialogue. This book could then be adapted for an operatic libretto in one of two ways, he told Strauss:

"Very possibly you may be able to make direct use of this dialogue, with its spoken sentences, just as you did with 'Salome'—so much the better; but it is also possible that on a closer inspection of my scenario you may want me to rearrange the whole scheme into something simpler and more lyrical, as Da Ponte did with Beaumarchais' 'Le Mariage de Figaro.' That I would willingly do, but I should never be able to work the whole thing from the beginning on that formal lyrical plan which leaves most of the characterization to the composer. In that case I should lose all feeling of certainty, and should produce something that would be a failure from both points of view."<sup>11</sup>

In succeeding letters the idea of *Der Rosenkavalier* gradually shaped up. Strauss was delighted when he received the first act, and wrote to Hofmannsthal: "The characters are all excellent—so clearly cut; only, as before, I shall need very good actors for them—the usual opera singers wouldn't do at all."<sup>12</sup>

But soon he begins to ask the poet for additions to provide room for musical expansion:

My work goes swimmingly. I am putting all my energy into it. Tomorrow I start on the levee. The scene for the Baron is finished, only I want you to make a little addition to it. At the end of his air, after the passage: "Muss halt ein Heu in der Nähe dabei sein," I want a big musical wind-up in the form of a trio; the baron repeats in rapid recitative:

"Dafür ist man kein Auerhahn und kein Hirsch,  
sondern ist man der Herr der Schöpfung.  
Wollt', ich könnt sein, wie Jupiter, selig  
in tausend Gestalten,  
Wär' Verwendung für jede!"

He must still go on boasting of all the wonderful things he can do, and for this I want 16 to 20 lines, dactyls if possible, in *buffo* style, working steadily up to a climax. Over that a duet for him and the Princess, a continuation of the passage:

"Er agiert mir gar zu gut!  
Lass Er mir doch das Kind!  
Er verdirbt mir das Mädchen,  
Schweig Er doch still, etc."



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

Octavian joins in—I should like him to burst out laughing after the Baron's last words, and generally make fun of him behind his back. Thus we get a capital situation for a trio, up to the moment when the Baron recollects himself and breaks in with the words: "Geb Sie mir doch den Grasaff da," etc. Please send me some extra lines for this purpose—I have done the music already, and only want the words to fill in.

It would be very nice if in Act II you would write something for a contemplative ensemble, just after the moment of the dramatic explosion, when the action comes to a standstill and all are lost in reflection. Such points of repose are always very telling; for example, the great ensemble in *Lohengrin*, Act II, known as "the heavy brooding"—or the quintet in *Die Meistersinger*, or again, in *Il Barbiere*, the A-flat ensemble at the end of Act I: *Freddo ed immobile*. Every musician knows these things and can play them over for you.<sup>13</sup>

Strauss used a firm hand in changing the original form and various details in the libretto of the second act, and Hofmannsthal recognized the merits of his suggestions: "The alterations you require are indispensable from your point of view, and, as they do not fight either with my original conception of the principal characters, nor, broadly speaking, with the general contour of the piece, I will set to work on them as soon as possible. I shall need a certain amount of time for my imagination to assimilate the new material, before I can feel and visualize, simply and vividly, the reconstructed whole. For the new scene—the two scenes in one—between the Baron and Sophie you must allow me a certain breadth in fundamentals so that my characters may not lose their grip."<sup>14</sup>

But he argued successfully with the composer when Strauss wanted to do the love duet between Sophie and Octavian in what the poet considered a too obvious operatic manner. Hofmannsthal insisted on a tender, restrained treatment that developed organically from the conversation of the two lovers: "I wish, so far as I can, to avoid any positively erotic embrace in the frenzied Wagnerian manner between these two simple young natures, who have nothing in common with Brünnhilde or Tristan."<sup>15</sup>

Hofmannsthal was well aware that the new style they were aiming at would be difficult to carry out, "but it is a *sine qua non* if our opera is to last ten years. Only those works survive which by the uniform novelty of their style at first offend, then gradually come to be accepted."<sup>16</sup>

## THE BOOK

In the last act, too, Strauss suggested some important changes. He proposed his own plan for the scene following the entrance of the Marschallin, and Hofmannsthal, recognizing the merits of the plan, made the alterations. But he urged anxiously that the poetic importance of the Princess' part should not be diminished, "for the intellectual unity of the music too would suffer, if the part of the Princess were not made sufficiently prominent."<sup>17</sup>

Only when the poet, after reading his book to friends, expressed his doubts about the length of the final scene, did the composer insist on his own judgment: "That it sounds feeble, when read aloud, is clear; but it is precisely at the end that the composer, when he has found the right idea, can get his best and loftiest effects—on a matter of this kind you may safely leave it to me to judge. I have finished now, and I believe the last of the three divisions is a brilliant success."<sup>18</sup> And no one will dispute Strauss's judgment of the beautiful trio and duet which end the opera.

The constructive collaboration between Strauss and Hofmannsthal is proof enough that a musician who knows his craft and a poet who has the understanding and ability to give way to musical requirements can together create a thoroughly successful operatic book.

While the scenario provides the composer with the opportunities to apply his musical forms, the wording becomes important for the details of melody, rhythm, and color.

Words of high literary quality, like those in *Rosenkavalier*, were not new in the history of opera. The books of the first Florentine operas by Rinuccini were real poetry, and so were Quinault's librettos for Lully, Zeno's and Metastasio's operatic texts in the eighteenth century, and Boito's books for Verdi's *Otello* and *Falstaff*.

In the seventeenth century the opera texts were written mostly in verses and rhymes that corresponded to the formalism of the classical musical prosody. They also employed much repetition of words, which in the hands of masters like Mozart became means for heightening the emotion, but which, when used by composers of lesser rank, became empty and often silly formulas.

With the abandonment of the classical musical form by the romantics, the rhyme lost its importance. Mozart was very definite about it: "Verses are indeed the most indispensable element for music, but

## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

rhymes—solely for the sake of rhyming—the most detrimental. Those high and mighty people who set to work in this pedantic fashion will always come to grief, both they and their music.”<sup>19</sup>

Verses were also absolutely necessary for Verdi. “Of course, anything can be put to music,” he wrote to the librettist Antonio Somma, “but not always with good effect. In composing music you need stanzas to write cantables, stanzas to write ensembles, stanzas for largos, for allegros, etc., etc., and all varied enough so that none of it turns out cold or monotonous.”<sup>20</sup>

Verdi took infinite pains to obtain from his librettists exactly the meter he needed for his musical phrases. Concerning the libretto for *King Lear* which he planned to compose, he wrote to Somma: “That sestina which you sent me is good; only, if you do four sestinas of ten syllables, the aria, or rather its rhythm, will be monotonous. If you need twenty-four or thirty lines to develop your idea, use them, but alternate the meter. Retain that first sestina and write another too, if you wish, but after them, change the meter. The more variety of meter there is, the more variety there will be in the music. If this aria had even three or four different meters, it would not be bad: the more originality in the form the better.”<sup>21</sup>

But a year later, in collaborating with Somma on *Un Ballo in Maschera*, he wrote: “Is it the meter or the rhyme that hampers you? If it is, turn this passage into a recitative. I prefer a good recitative to a mediocre lyric stanza.”<sup>22</sup>

Wagner used his own verses and varied them according to his plots: verses of four and five feet with rhymes for lyric parts; alliteration to characterize the primitive period of the action in the *Ring*; doggerel rhymes to set forth the medieval rules of the Meistersinger.

With the dissolution of musical form beginning in *Tristan* and extending to the impressionism of Debussy’s *Pelléas* and Schoenberg’s school, the verse scheme, too, dissolved into wordings without any regular rhythm. Hofmannsthal’s *Rosenkavalier* keeps a golden middle road: stanzas in flexible, varying rhythms, with rhymes used only for real songs like Baron Ochs’ waltz, the love duet of Octavian and Sophie in the second act, and their folktune-like final duet in the last act:

“Ist ein Traum, kann nicht wirklich sein  
dass wir zwei beieinander sein,

beieinand' fuer alle Zeit  
und Ewigkeit!"

(This a dream. Tell me; is it true  
That you love me and I love you.  
You and I, one soul, one heart,  
We'll never part.)

As in the legitimate theater, no definite pattern can be set concerning the number of acts and scenes for an operatic book. Italian opera leaned toward using a great variety of scenes. The books of the Venetian operas in the seventeenth century already had three acts consisting of three or four different sets each, and this tradition of many scenes may still be seen in Italian operas like Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, Verdi's *Il Trovatore*, *Forza del Destino*, and *Aïda*, and Boito's *Mefistofele*.

In contrast was the tradition of French opera, which followed the severe classical formula of the *tragedie lyrique*. Verdi remarked: "In this the French are right: they plan their dramas so as to need only one scene for each act; thus the action flows freely without hindrance and without anything to distract the attention of the public."<sup>23</sup> Although this was not to remain a definite rule in French opera (for instance, *Faust* has eight scenes, *Pelléas* has twelve), in general the sound dramatic technique of the French librettists kept the number of scenes under some restraint.

German opera also tended toward a simpler structure, Wagner preferring the three-act form, mostly with just three or four sets. Russian operas, partaking frequently of the epic character of the nation's legends and novels, often consist of four or five acts with many scenes; *Boris Godounov* uses ten scenes, Prokofiev's *War and Peace* uses eleven.

A trend toward greater concentration is noticeable in more recent operas: for example, in the one-act form of *Cavalleria Rusticana*, *Salome*, *Elektra*, Schoenberg's monodramas, and Douglas Moore's *The Devil and Daniel Webster*, and in the two-act form of *Pagliacci*, *Hänsel and Gretel*, *Ariadne*, Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex*, Gruenberg's *Emperor Jones*, and Menotti's *The Medium*. Until our century this two-act form had not been used much since Mozart's time (*Don Giovanni*, *Così fan tutte*, *Magic Flute*, and Beethoven's *Fidelio*); it resembles the usual pattern of the American musical theater today.



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

From the beginning opera has been fond of mechanical effects. In addition, the librettists provided for the use of chorus and ballet, not merely for the sake of showmanship, but to give the composer a chance to heighten the emotional impact in mass scenes expressing joy and despair. We find these means of musical expression in operas from Gluck to Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*.

The librettist will also further the theatrical success of the opera if he writes effective parts for the singers. Mozart took great care to consider the individual virtues of his leading singers. While preparing the first performance of the *Abduction* he wrote to his father: "As we have given the part of Osmin to Herr Fischer, who certainly has an excellent bass voice (in spite of the fact that the Archbishop told me that he sang too low for a bass and that I assured him he would sing higher next time), we must take advantage of it, particularly as he has the whole Viennese public on his side. But in the original libretto Osmin has only this short song and nothing else to sing, except in the trio and the finale; so he has been given an aria in Act I, and he is to have another in Act II."<sup>24</sup>

And when the singer Raaff at the rehearsals for the première of *Idomeneo* complained about the phrase "Vienmi a rin vigorir," Mozart agreed, "Five *i*'s! It is true, at the end of an aria, it is very disagreeable," and changed the words.<sup>25</sup>

In our time Puccini was the unsurpassed master in furnishing the singers with effective parts. The roles of Mimi, Butterfly, and Tosca are loved by both singers and the public. It is no dishonor for a good librettist to have an eye on these practical matters when writing the operatic book. Even a master as uncompromising as Verdi was not ashamed to confess, "The only thing I am looking for is success."<sup>26</sup>

*The*

# MUSIC

**IN SETTING** the book to music the composer selects the various means which musical technique offers to express the sentiments, development, and actions of the characters. He should remember that the nature of the plot ought to determine the musical style of the opera—and that not everything in opera is necessarily “grand” or must always be sung.

Unfortunately, this latter fact has often been forgotten in modern opera, partly because of the influence which Wagner’s music dramas have exercised on his successors and partly because of the usual inflated style of opera production. It might therefore be useful to describe some of the musical styles that have made up operatic history, in order to give us a more subtle definition of the musical means and the methods for applying them that are at the disposal of the composer.

One type of opera—dating from the first operas to Lully’s and Gluck’s musical dramas, to Bellini’s *Norma*, Wagner’s works, Verdi’s *Aïda*, Saint-Saëns’ *Samson*, Richard Strauss’s *Elektra*, and Stravinsky’s *Oedipus Rex*—follows the tradition of *opera seria*. It deals with the olympian world of gods and heroes, whose exalted positions are

## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

expressed in a continuous musical interpretation of a grandiose nature.

The musical style of *opera seria* consists either of a succession of orchestral (*accompagnato*) recitatives alternating with musical "numbers," or a continuous application of these forms woven into one symphonic "unending melody" as in works like Richard Strauss's *Salome* and *Elektra*. The production of these works requires big voices, grandiloquent gestures, and, following Wagner, usually a big orchestra.

But there is another, less demanding type of opera which originated in the eighteenth-century folk operas and developed into a form of lyric theater in the nineteenth century. This kind of opera deals with people from everyday life, and there is no need for them to sing all the time. Their communication of realistic facts is more properly expressed by dialogue, and only when their feelings, say of joy or sadness, rise to the point of emotional expression does a musical treatment become desirable.

In France this type of opera was called *opéra comique* (to which category the works of Grétry and Auber belong), and it later developed into the French *drâme lyrique* (such as *Mignon*, *Carmen*, and *Manon*). In Germany it was named *Singspiel*, a form we know from Mozart's *Abduction from the Seraglio*, and soon grew into bigger forms in *The Magic Flute*, Beethoven's *Fidelio*, and Weber's *Der Freischütz*. In England the corresponding term was *ballad opera* and *The Beggar's Opera* is its classic example.

Folk opera in all three of these national variations used spoken dialogue; only its Italian version, *opera buffa* (such as Pergolesi's *La*

Don Ottavio

Ah, si segua il suo pas-so: io vo' con le - i di-vi-de-rei mar-ti-ri; sa-ran

Parte

me - co, men gra-vi i suoi so - spi-ri.

Example 1. From Mozart's *Don Giovanni*.

*Serva Padrona*, Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro*, and Rossini's *Barber of Seville*) used the so-called *secco* (dry) recitative, which is actually a musical dialogue recited over the chords of the clavicembalo (today usually replaced by the piano). By observing the original method of its notation (Example 1), as well as by listening to Italian singers who have mastered this kind of recitative (for instance, Pinza and Baccaloni in *Don Giovanni* or the soloists in the Glyndebourne recordings of this opera), we realize that *secco* recitatives are not meant to be sung, but are musical declamations related to the individual Italian manner of speaking.

The French, who have a particularly fine sense of discrimination in the matter of artistic forms, distinguish between these two types of opera in their two opera houses in Paris: the representative (Grand) Opéra holding 2165 seats and the smaller house of the Opéra Comique with 1650 seats. These names do not stand for serious and comic opera, but for "grand opera" which is entirely sung (such as *Samson and Delilah*) and operas of a more realistic nature which use spoken dialogue (*Carmen* and *Manon*).

In other countries the intimate style of comic opera was made possible by the fact that most opera houses were comparatively small; the state opera houses in Berlin, Munich, and Dresden, for instance, held about 1800 seats.

The composers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries applied the two types of recitative (orchestral *accompagnato* and the clavicembalo *secco* recitative) with fine discretion according to the style of the plot and their function within the drama. In *Figaro* most of the recitatives where the plot is factually developed are treated as *secco* recitatives. But when Figaro or the Countess realize the seriousness of a situation (for instance, in Figaro's recitative, "Tutto è disposto," or in the Countess's C major aria, "E Susanna non vien"), the orchestral recitative is used.

*Faust* was originally written and first performed at the Théâtre Lyrique with spoken dialogue. Later, when it was given at the Opéra, this was replaced by recitatives. *Carmen*, too, written for the Opéra Comique, originally had spoken dialogue and is still performed there in that form. It was for its performance in Vienna that Giraud composed the recitatives which are most often used in our grand opera performances of *Carmen* today.



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

The technique of the orchestral recitative was developed by Wagner and his modern successors to a point where it could express in music the finest shades of psychological meaning indicated in the words of the libretto. This onomatopoeic technique reached special heights in its use by composers like Debussy (*Pelléas*) and Richard Strauss (*Rosenkavalier*, *Ariadne*, and *Intermezzo*).

Another way of handling dialogue in music is the melodrama. We know this form from the second act of Beethoven's *Fidelio*, where Leonore and Rocco, descending into the jail, express their thoughts in dialogue spoken against an orchestral background. Mozart, much impressed by two melodramas of his time, *Medea* and *Ariadne* by Georg Benda, wrote to his father:

"Indeed, nothing has ever surprised me so much, for I had always imagined that such a piece would be quite ineffective! You know, of course, that there is no singing in it, only recitation, to which the music is like a sort of obbligato accompaniment to a recitative. Now and then words are spoken while the music goes on, and this produces the finest effect. . . . Do you know what I think? I think that most operatic recitatives should be treated in this way—and only sung occasionally, when the words *can be perfectly expressed by the music*."<sup>1</sup>

This remarkable endorsement of the melodramatic dialogue in opera by Mozart, as well as its use by Weber in *Freischütz* and *Oberon*, indicates the effectiveness of this medium. It is the same technique the movies employ when dialogue reaching emotional heights is spoken against background music.

A fifth method of dialogue in opera is the imitation of speech in

Gesprochen

Wozzeck: Das Mes-ser? Wo ist das Mes-ser? Ich habs da ge-las-sen

Example 2. From Alban Berg's *Wozzeck*.

Reproduced by permission of Associated Music Publishers, Inc., on behalf of Universal-Edition, Vienna.

## THE MUSIC

music by means of the so-called *Sprechstimme* (spoken voice) technique as it was first used in Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* and his monodramas. Later Alban Berg applied this technique effectively in his *Wozzeck*. It aims at writing down, by a new method of musical notation (Example 2), the various intonations and shades of realistic declamation which go beyond the regular half-tone system.

With the same sense of discrimination that the great composer applies in selecting the proper form of dialogue for the factual development of the story, he chooses among the various other forms of musical technique for its emotional resting-places and dramatic conflicts. These means are the solo arias; the combinations of two or more voices in duet, trio, quartet, and so on; ensembles and finales in which solo voices and often the chorus join; chorus numbers, dances, marches; and other types of musical composition, each orchestrated according to the dramatic function of the particular number within the musical play.

A classic model of a perfect functional choice of musical means is Mozart's *Magic Flute*. In this opera the story is carried by spoken dialogue, which in moments of heightened dramatic significance, such as the scene between Tamino and the Speaker, is replaced by the orchestral recitative. Each musical "number" is chosen according to its particular character: Papageno, the "child of nature," sings in the style of folksongs, and Mozart actually used the Austrian folktune "Ueb' immer Treu und Redlichkeit" (Be always faithful and true) for his second aria. Pamina expresses her pure sentiments in an aria of the classic style of Gluck; Sarastro pronounces his ideas on humanity in simple strophic arias; the Queen of the Night is presented in the theatrical manner of Italian *opera seria*; the Moor Monostatos sings his ditty to Turkish music; the priests resound in solemn choruses of the monumental style of French classic opera.

Similarly, the ensemble numbers range from the simple folktune duets of Papageno and Pamina and Papageno and Papagena to trios of the three ladies and the genii, a quartet of the three genii with Pamina, and two elaborate quintets for Tamino, Papageno, and the three ladies. Added to all these are the use of Bach's contrapuntal style in adopting the chorale "Ach Gott, vom Himmel sieh darein" and fugue for the climax of the mysterious rites of the trial by fire and

## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

water, the orchestral illustrations of Tamino's flight before the snake, the magic sound of the flute, the silver bells, the flying effect of the three genii, and the marches of the priests.

And every number was orchestrated by Mozart in the most appropriately expressive yet economical manner, a novel art that greatly impressed Beethoven. He also admired Mozart's ability to characterize different moods by certain keys, such as humor by G major, deep tragedy by c minor, representative ceremony by C major, and the sacred solemnity of Sarastro's realm by E flat major.

A wonderful tonal relationship welds the divergent thirteen scenes of the opera into a unity of the highest musical order. The entire, seemingly loose succession of twenty-one different numbers is built on a plan of keys that results in a superb over-all balance:

Overture	<i>E flat major</i>	14	d minor
Number 1	c minor to C	15	E major
	major	16	A major
2	G major	17	g minor
3	E flat major	18	D major
4, 5	B flat major	19	B flat major
6	G major	20	F major
7	E flat major	21	E flat major
8	C major		c minor to C major
9, 10	F major		G major
11	C major		c minor to B flat
12	G major		major
13	C major		<i>E flat major</i>

E flat major, representing Sarastro's world, is the basic key. It is established in the overture and the opera returns to it in the finale of the second act. All the keys stand in harmonious relationship except those of numbers 13, 14, and 15, where the intrusion of the Queen of the Night into the realm of Sarastro seems to call for the clashing contrast of unrelated keys, and number 17, where Pamina's aria in g minor follows like a melancholy cloud the A major brightness of the preceding trio of the three genii. Notice particularly how within this larger scheme the finale, number 21, brings the five last scenes into a single unit of its own order by the *attacca* succession of E flat major-c minor to C major-G major-c minor-E flat major.

Considering this perfection of the opera's musical and dramatic architecture, one can hardly understand why some modern interpreters

still believe they can "improve" Mozart by changing scenes around within this organic finale. This practice, in addition to the usual paralyzing waits caused by the difficult sceneshifts, often distorts the effectiveness of this masterwork.

We mentioned earlier the well-built structure of Da Ponte's book for the finales in *Figaro*. This enabled Mozart to create for the second act an incomparable *buffo* finale, in which seven different sections, standing in close harmonic relationship (E flat major-B flat major-G major-C major-F major-B flat major-E flat major; note how the tonality ascends in the first two sections and descends in the others in fifths), are formed into one big symphonic unity of 937 measures. This and the finale of Act IV are models of ensemble technique in comic opera. They should be a fruitful source of study for future operatic writers and composers—no less than the analysis of classic examples of ensemble technique in serious operas, such as Act IV of Meyerbeer's *Huguenots*, the magnificent build-up of the first act of *Lohengrin*, the finale of the second act of *Die Meistersinger*, and various ensembles in Verdi's operas.

Mozart's treatment of the voice parts was conceived according to the roles of the characters. Papageno sings only simple folktunes, and his part can be done by any good actor with a fair singing voice. Actually, Mozart favored actors for comedy parts and the use of declamation in ensemble numbers. Even when preparing an *opera seria*, *Idomeneo*, he complained about the tenor Raaff, who wanted to show his vocal abilities in a quartet, "as if one should not much rather speak in a quartet than sing."<sup>2</sup> He required the art of *bel canto* for noble characters like Tamino and Pamina, and the fireworks of grand opera coloratura for the "star-flaming" Queen of the Night. And in such cases he did not shun making concessions to the singers. In composing the *Abduction* he acknowledged, "I sacrificed the aria of Konstanze a bit to the voluble gullet of Mademoiselle Cavalieri."<sup>3</sup>

With the romantic era the restraint characteristic of Mozart's use of musical means diminished. Beethoven carried the expression of Leonore's emotions in *Fidelio* to vocal extremes, and the grand operas of Rossini, Donizetti, and Meyerbeer established a new style of dramatic singing.

The evolution of operatic singing had begun around 1600 with the simple old Italian art which subordinated the tone to the expression



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

of the word within a modest vocal range. This technique developed into the great classic art of "bel canto" (beautiful singing), which flourished throughout the eighteenth century and was expanded and exploited for the sake of grand opera effects during the first half of the nineteenth century. And from this grew the practice of making heavier and heavier demands on vocal strength. The tenor Roger, who sang the first Prophète at the Paris Opéra, was already complaining that the new Verdi operas "ruined the strongest lungs within a few years."

Wagner increased the demands on the human voice still further by expanding the soprano of Leonore or Norma to the "hoch dramatische" (high dramatic) soprano of Isolde and Brünnhilde; the tenor of the Prophète to the "Heldentenor" (heroic tenor) of Tristan and Siegfried; and the bass of Marcel in the *Huguenots* to the "Heldenbaritone" (though called "bass" by Wagner) of Hans Sachs and Wotan—roles of taxing length that require imposing vocal quantity often at the expense of discriminating nuance. Richard Strauss would seem finally to have reached the limits of this development in parts like those of Salome and Elektra.

The decadence of the art of singing, then, can be traced to the extreme demands made on the human voice in the symphonic treatment of opera by Wagner and his successors. No wonder that today hardly any singer can be found who is equal to the role of Elektra, while the Isoldes, Siegfrieds, and Wotans are becoming everywhere dangerously scarce.

In similar fashion the appropriate choice of orchestration employed in the classic period has given way largely to an indiscriminate use of the full modern orchestra.

The orchestra of the Staendetheater in Prague, which played *Figaro* as well as the first performance of *Don Giovanni* in 1787, and played them to Mozart's satisfaction, consisted of twenty-five musicians: three first violins, four second, two violas, one cello, two basses, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, and one drum. Trombones were engaged only when needed.

But Wagner's orchestra at the first Bayreuth Festival in 1876 consisted of 116 players: thirty-two violins, twelve violas, twelve cellos, eight double basses, four flutes, four oboes, one English horn, four

## THE MUSIC

clarinets, one bass clarinet, four bassoons, one contra bassoon, seven horns, four trumpets, one bass trumpet, four trombones, one contra-bass trombone, two tenor tubas, two bass tubas, one contrabass tuba, three kettle drums, and eight harps.<sup>4</sup>

And Wagner's orchestra did not merely carry the voices; it made them part of a symphonic fabric. In post-Wagnerian works like Richard Strauss's *Salome* and *Elektra* and Alban Berg's *Wozzeck* this orchestral apparatus grew to mammoth proportions, submerging the human voice in a maelstrom of orchestral sound from which few lungs could make themselves heard.

In many cases this procedure created discrepancies between the story and the musical means—in *Hänsel and Gretel*, for instance, where the *Meistersinger*-like orchestra, notwithstanding the perfection of its polyphonic scoring, hardly belongs to the simple, naive world of children.

Richard Strauss, the great technical master, recognizing the danger of this unhealthy development, was the first among modern composers to return to a more constructive selection of musical means. In *Ariadne auf Naxos* in 1912 he surprised the musical world with an operatic score employing only thirty-five musicians. Stravinsky followed in 1918 with an orchestra of seven for *L'Histoire du Soldat*. Later composers like Hindemith (*Hin und zurück*), Kurt Weill, Benjamin Britten (*Rape of Lucretia*), and Menotti (*The Telephone* and *The Medium*) have tended to continue this trend toward reasonable economy in the use of the orchestral apparatus.

We might add here briefly another factor that may play a part in the composition of an opera: the national characteristics of musical style resulting from language and theatrical tradition. We readily notice that the works of Verdi, Lully, Wagner, Moussorgsky, and Gershwin sound different one from another—different in general characteristics that indicate, not the individual approach of the composer, but the established style of his countrymen.

Caruso's recording of "Celeste Aïda," for instance, illustrates the clear dramatic diction in the recitative and the bel canto treatment of the aria that are characteristic of the Italian operatic style. French singers employ a typical stylized declamation (stemming from the

## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

French national theater, the Comédie Française) which does not put particular emphasis on vocal effects. Chaliapin's interpretation of *Boris* illuminates the Russian style: complete subordination of vocal beauty to realistic characterization and the color of the dramatic mood. Recordings from Melchior's Wagnerian roles demonstrate the theatrically accentuated diction of German music drama. Tibbett's recordings of Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* display the "portamenti" and jazz rhythms used in American folk music.

It is only proper that these national characteristics should give to an opera its original flavor and should add new colors to the international palette of the operatic repertoire. But Richard Strauss showed that the operatic composer need not be too pedantic about the historical accuracy of the musical means employed when in *Rosenkavalier* he wrote Viennese waltzes that did not yet exist at the time of the play. The appropriateness to the Viennese setting of Vienna's best known folk dance, the waltz, was sufficient to justify its use. On the other hand, it seems meaningless for a composer to imitate specific national musical elements such as the Italian *secco* recitative when he is dealing with words in a language whose characteristic forms bear no real inner relationship to this particular style of musical utterance.

Lack of discrimination in the post-Wagnerian composers with regard to style and vocal and orchestral treatment has often enough produced operas that are undistinguished hodgepodes of musical means, but even those constructed with economy and simplicity are unlikely to remain faithful to their real natures when they are staged under the conditions that prevail in America. For here the presentation of opera in theaters of great size and in languages foreign to the audience seems inevitably to make any opera "grand opera," in whatever style it may have been written.

Indeed, what would the original dialogue in *Carmen* mean if spoken by singers who may not speak French to an audience which does not understand it in a house so big that it could hardly be heard? It would have the effect more of interrupting the continuity of the musical play than of binding dialogue and musical numbers together. That is why *Carmen* is so often sung with Giraud's recitatives, and why even

## THE MUSIC

Beethoven's *Fidelio* was given for some time at the Metropolitan with recitatives composed by Arthur Bodanzky.

In America *opera buffa*, performed in the big opera houses, is being blown up to *opera seria* format. At the Metropolitan *The Marriage of Figaro* had to be produced as grand opera, and the traditional performance of *The Barber of Seville* usually relies on vocal exaggerations and slapstick comedy. This latter practice is often criticized, though it obviously contributes to the effectiveness of the performance under the given conditions. The Metropolitan performance of a work as delicate as Debussy's *Pelléas* was praised for its singularly effective theatrical treatment, which was contrary to the composer's intention, but which did help the opera to "get over"—to carry its story to listeners too far from the stage to catch the subtler forms of dramatic expression.

Also, in the huge houses big voices are a necessity. And so the singer who sings Isolde also sings Elsa, and the chorus in a comic opera is as big as in *Aida*. In short, elements of musical production are not applied in accordance with the original style and the dramatic significance of the opera; they are used in whatever form and way seems most likely to make a spectacular performance.

At the same time that the styles of foreign comic and lyric opera are being inflated to grand opera proportions, American folk opera is maintaining a natural intimacy with its audiences in the legitimate theaters on Broadway. Oscar Hammerstein II, the enthusiastic author of American lyric theater, told me that in his opinion "opera in America has to go on the operatic stage through the back door of Broadway." It is here that during recent years American folk opera has been growing from the soil of the musical theater in a way not unlike the origin of the several forms of European folk opera in the eighteenth century.

In Vienna Johann Strauss's *The Bat* and *The Gypsy Baron* live at the same opera theater with their grown-up cousin *Die Meistersinger*, but folk opera in America, such as Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*, Hammerstein's *Oklahomal*, Kern's *Show Boat*, Douglas Moore's *The Devil and Daniel Webster*, Kurt Weill's *Street Scene*, and others, have made their homes in Broadway theaters. And operas like Menotti's *The Telephone* and *The Medium*, first performed at the opera workshop of



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

Columbia University, were careful to take off their title of "opera" before they started their successful run of more than two hundred performances at a Broadway theater.

For the average American, opera is not musical drama, but an awe-inspiring musical mystery shrouded in clouds above the heads of the people.

# OPERA

## *in English*

**NOTHING** could contribute more effectively to keeping opera a mystery to its audience than the foreign language in which in America it is usually performed.

In view of the history of opera in this country, it is easy to understand why in the past grand opera was presented in its original language, but the present interest of the American people in opera provides ample reason for revising this practice.

The former public avoided the unmasking of opera because they enjoyed it primarily for the sensual pleasure of its music. They refrained from any real participation in the dramatic details of either tragic or comic opera. They preferred a beautifully singing but dramatically cold Isolde to the "wild, loving" Irish maid of Wagner's dramatic characterization, whom European audiences expect even at the expense of certain vocal shortcomings. For the same reason the American grand opera audience was reluctant to indulge in the hearty laughter that comes from understanding the many humorous words and lines in comic opera.

However, endeavors to give opera in the vernacular for the American

## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

audience have never ceased. We have mentioned the fact that for the first ninety years of its history opera in America meant exclusively opera in English. Even after opera in foreign languages acquired its dominant position, various companies producing grand opera in English and even native American opera (such as William H. Fry's *Leonora* in 1845 and George F. Bristow's *Rip Van Winkle* in 1855) continued these efforts.

These companies make up an imposing list, running from those of Clara Louise Kellogg and Emma Abbott, the American Opera Company under Theodore Thomas, the successful organizations of Henry W. Savage, Aborn, Hinshaw, and many others, to the American Opera Company, which originated in Rochester, New York, and the numerous organizations in our time.

We should also mention in this connection the fact that the Metropolitan Opera, for political reasons, performed Wagner's *Parsifal*, *Tristan*, and *Lohengrin* in English for a short period following World War I, and later presented in English translations works like *The Bartered Bride*, *Magic Flute*, *Fidelio* (these three under Bruno Walter), Mozart's *Abduction from the Seraglio*, Puccini's *Gianni Schicci*, and Verdi's *Falstaff* (these last two being returned to the original Italian during the 1948-49 season). Also, during his first season as general manager, Rudolf Bing gave Johann Strauss's classic operetta, *Die Fledermaus*, in an English version.

But in general, in spite of all these valuable attempts, opera in the vernacular has so far not succeeded in becoming a permanent policy of the major opera companies in America.

The defenders of foreign-language opera assert that only the combination of the original words and music can transmit the intended artistic values and therefore provide real enjoyment of opera. This argument, though undoubtedly esthetically correct, is not justified practically because by far the greater part of the audience does not understand the original languages and so is in no position to experience these qualities.

The people in Milan and Vienna, Paris and Moscow, Stockholm and Zurich, Prague and Budapest have never accepted the "esthetic" principle. Even at England's Covent Garden, where opposition to opera in the vernacular persisted successfully for practically three centuries, it has recently given way to opera in English. Undoubtedly, the musi-

## IN ENGLISH

cians in Milan and Vienna realize that from an esthetic point of view the performances of *Pelléas* in French and *Boris Godounov* in Russian are preferable to those of either work in Italian or German. But they participate in this theoretical form of enjoyment only on such occasions as festival or guest performances by foreign companies.

No American theatergoer would want to attend a performance of *Antigone* or *Medea* in the original Greek or of the modernized versions of these dramas by Jean Anouilh, in French. But Moussorgsky's *Boris Godounov* is being presented in America neither in English nor in its original Russian, but in a version by Rimsky-Korsakov in Italian!

Also, the time has passed when the nationality of the singers is an argument for performances in the original language. No longer is an Italian, French, or German opera performed mostly by singers imported from the country of its origin. Today most opera singers, whether foreign or American, are singing in languages that are alien to them. Consequently, very often a miserable rendition of Italian, French, or German diction is heard with rapture by esthetic purists who are opposed to opera in the vernacular, although it would undoubtedly upset their enjoyment of these performances if they could understand them. Under these circumstances there is little justification for boasting of one's appreciation of the original.

Another fact should be stressed. The function of the theater has never been the same as that of a museum or a university. To these institutions the preservation and transmission of historic values are a primary object, but the theater concerns itself with interpreting the works of the past in present-day terms; it presents even the (classics) in new productions fitted to the temper of its own day, in order to make these works appear as extensions of the lives or realizations of the inner wishes of its contemporary audience.

The person who declares, "I just want to enjoy the music in an opera and don't need to understand the words," simply does not know what opera is. He can mean hardly more than that he sits waiting through long stretches of dramatic music for some lyric "numbers" which he enjoys only superficially for the sake of their melody and vocal effects and without experiencing their true motivation. This is a far cry from the real function of the theater and the intentions of its great masters.

How, for example, can one understand the music of Figaro's solo



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

scene in the first act of Mozart's opera without comprehension of the words? Figaro, who has just found out that his master, the Count, is making secret approaches to his Susanna, analyzes his thoughts in dramatic declamation which in an unknown language can have no meaning. Also, the music of the cavatina was not written merely to offer a pleasant melody, but as a musical expression of Figaro's ironic plotting: according to his words, he plans to make the Count dance to the tune of his guitar; hence the pizzicato minuet rhythm.

If the reader will sing Example 3, the first time with the original Italian words (if he happens to know Italian, let him try to put himself in the position of the average American listener for whom the words would be only sounds, without any content), and then a second time with the English words, he will be able to judge for himself what different meaning the music takes on for him when he understands the words. By applying this process to an entire opera, he will realize that there can be no understanding of operatic music without understanding of the words from and for which it was conceived and without which it must remain meaningless.

There is good reason, therefore, for two men of such different backgrounds as the British scholar Edward J. Dent and the American writer and producer Oscar Hammerstein II to come to the defense of opera in English.

Professor Dent, who in addition to his authority as a musicologist has translated a number of operas into English, says in his pocket book on *Opera*: "There are still some connoisseurs who maintain that it is sacrilege to perform any opera except in the language in which it was originally written. Sometimes this attitude is due merely to exclusiveness, to pride in their own exaggerated critical sense for vocal technique, or in their intimate knowledge of foreign languages. Still, the position is a logical one, and if consistently maintained would forbid all translation of literary works." But he concludes that "the most sensible way to look at the matter is to acknowledge the fact that English is the language of this country and that therefore we must either have opera in English or renounce all hope of understanding it."<sup>1</sup>

The professor of music at Cambridge University is seconded by the leading librettist of the American musical theater, Oscar Hammerstein II. In the introduction to the book of *Carmen Jones* he relates

*Moderato*

Bra-vo, signor pa-dro-ne!      O-ra incomin-cio      a ca-pir il mi-  
 Splen-did, my dearest master!      Now I'm be-gin-ning      to unscramble this

ste-ro,      e a ve-der schietto tutto il vostro pro-getto:      a Londra, e  
 pus-zle      and see your purpose in its pro-per di-mensions.      We're off to

ve-ro?      Voi mi-ni-stro,      io cor-rie-ro,      e la Su - sanna  
 Lon-don,      you as en-voy,      I as courier;      and my Sa - sanna

se-greta ambascia-tri-ce      non sa-rà, non sa-rà! Fi-ga-ro      il di-ce.  
 am-bas-sa-dress in secret!      That shall never be so - Fi-ga-ro      has spo-ken!

Example 3. From Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*.

The English translation is by Ruth and Thomas Martin. Copyright 1947, 1948, 1951 by G. Schirmer, Inc. Reprinted by permission.

## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

the story of how as a small boy he was taken by his mother to the Manhattan Opera House, which at that time was managed by his grandfather, Oscar Hammerstein I. His mother had explained to him, "It's like a show, only the actors sing all their lines instead of speaking them." He continues:

"Well! My mother hadn't told me the worst. Not only were they singing everything, but everything was in a language I couldn't understand. 'What are they singing?' I whispered to mother. 'Italian.' I looked around at the audience. 'Do all these people know Italian?' 'Only a few,' she answered. 'Then why do they sing it in Italian, Mother?' 'They always do. Stop asking questions.' No wonder she told me to stop asking questions. There is no sensible answer to that one and she knew it. I sat back in the well-cushioned orchestra chair—grandpa built beautiful opera houses—and I found myself enjoying the lovely music coming up from the orchestra pit. But I was puzzled and disturbed by the accompanying action on the stage. Sometimes the fat lady would look very sad, and there was no way of knowing why. Sometimes she laughed, but I wouldn't know what the joke was and I wished I did. It then seemed quite clear to me why grandpa lost money on opera. Listening to people sing words you didn't understand wasn't much fun. That's what I thought then. That's what I think now. . . . There is a strange theory in this country, that opera is 'over our heads!' It isn't at all. It just by-passes us and refuses to communicate with us. If you're not a linguist you're just out of luck."<sup>2</sup>

One serious obstacle in the way of opera in English is the fact that, although a great number of fine American singers have developed, particularly since the beginning of World War II, for many roles there are hardly any as yet to equal foreign singers in accomplishment. We shall discuss the reasons for this later, but we must admit that there are today scarcely any American singers on a par with foreign singers for such roles as Tristan, Siegfried, Wotan, Hans Sachs, Otello. And these foreign artists do not sing the roles in English.

Since we are not advocating opera in English for chauvinistic reasons and agree that artistic quality must always be the first consideration in choosing singers, we have to recognize that opera in the vernacular cannot be forced upon companies like the Metropolitan or the San Francisco Opera; the size of their houses and their method of operation require bigger and more dramatic voices than the training of

singers in America now produces. Also, there are good reasons why opera should be given in model performances on exceptional occasions in the original languages, just as is done at the Salzburg and Glyndebourne festivals. However, these facts should not obstruct, but rather stimulate, endeavors to train singers and provide translations for the essential goal: opera in English.

One argument frequently advanced against translating opera is that the English language is unmusical and unsuited for singing. Professor Dent has rejected this argument, pointing to the unopposed use of English for oratorio. He says: "English is a perfectly good language for singing, if singers will take the trouble to pronounce it naturally as actors do. Even when English is difficult to sing, it is less difficult than German can be in some of the standard German operas."<sup>3</sup>

We realize "that most syllables in English are short, especially when strongly accented, so that there is a very limited choice of words suitable to be placed on long, drawn-out notes," and we might add that the various shades of the diphthongs offer another problem. But there are similar difficulties for the French singer in his nasal manner of speaking and for the German singer because of his many gutturals, to say nothing of people like the Czechs whose language is full of hard consonants. Yet they do not stop singing Verdi and Wagner in their own language. Experience shows that good singers who master their vocal technique and the enunciation of consonants are able to sing well in any language.

Hammerstein attributes the persistent negative answer to the plea for opera in English to the fact that the great operas, "originally written by distinguished dramatic poets, are translated by scholarly but untalented gentlemen who know very little about the science of writing phonetic, singable lyrics. They are not poets nor dramatists nor showmen. A good adaptation of an opera requires a librettist who is all of these."<sup>4</sup> Professor Dent, too, believes that "opera will never flourish until a tradition of really good translation is established."

There are, however, a number of talented musical translators already at work in America, such as Ruth and Thomas Martin, Robert A. Simon, George Mead, Edward Eager, Boris Goldovsky, Rosamond Chapin, and a number of others who are waiting, either with translations ready on their shelves or eager to make new ones.

In view of the importance of this element of operatic production, it



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

seems worth while to discuss briefly the problems confronting the translator in this task.

It is undoubtedly difficult to translate operas by Verdi or Debussy into English, but no more difficult than to translate these works or Handel's *Messiah* into German, which is the accepted practice in all German-speaking countries. Unfortunately, many of our translators and listeners are making the difficulties worse by thinking that an operatic translation must itself be a poetic masterpiece. They forget that a translation of an operatic libretto has quite a different function: namely, to transmit the meaning of the original combination of *words and music* to the audience. This purpose will make any translation necessarily a compromise with the ideal. And those writers who are familiar with the standard German or Italian versions of foreign operas might take some comfort from their imperfections.

What are the tasks of the translator of an opera? We can list six:

1. To transmit the meaning of the original words (for which the music was written and without which it would be meaningless).

2. To choose words that fit the original musical accents and values.

3. To select words of dramatic significance and fluency in order to make the translation intelligible. This is important in order to project the words across the footlights, which is more difficult in an opera than in a play because of the volume of the orchestra and the size of our opera theaters.

4. To preserve, if possible, the flavor of the period of the story since this is reflected in the musical treatment. This task includes the problem of keeping sentences that accord with the construction of the musical forms.

5. To achieve phonetics that serve the demands of vocal technique. However, this point need not be exaggerated. For instance, Wagner used the vowel *i* for the climax of high musical phrases, both at the end of the Grail story in *Lohengrin* ("Sein Ritter ich") and at the end of Act I in *Siegfried* ("so schneidet Siegfried's Schwert"). Actually, every singer has his preferred vowels and it would be impossible to please them all with a uniform rule.

6. To select such words as correspond to the musical mood. This point is of the utmost importance, for although the stilted language of certain older translations sounds old-fashioned today, the emotional nature of musical expression requires a choice of words capable

of conveying exalted sentiments. For this reason the use of everyday language in an operatic translation will not necessarily bring the opera closer to the American audience; it may actually increase the distance between them. A prosaic "Goodbye" sung by Mimi to her lover Rudolph as she leaves him might sound unrelated to the emotional quality of Puccini's music; a "Farewell" might succeed much better in carrying the musical mood.

On the other hand, the white American and the British are prone to understate their sentiments—in contrast to the Italian, who is not ashamed of giving his feelings away. I owe to Lawrence Tibbett the fine observation that an American popular singer would croon words like "I am burning with passion" in a manner which to an Italian or German would seem passive and apathetic—and that for this psychological reason the English translator must be careful to select words restrained enough to escape classification as "corny" and yet poetic enough to convey the heightened musical mood.

I believe that the failure to use such words and the lack of the courage needed to project them with full intensity of vocal breath support and diction are in most cases the real reasons why performances of opera in English do not seem convincing.

If all these demands are to be achieved, then as Edward Dent said, "there is not much chance left for 'poetry'"! But any fair translation that succeeds in re-creating the original's blend of words and music into a unit of dramatic expression will be doubled in effectiveness by the power of the musical interpretation. And the most beautiful poetry, if it does not provide the music with a counterpart of its original significance, will fail.

Let us compare three existing translations of the beginning of the Countess's C major aria in the third act of *The Marriage of Figaro*. The original words of the first four lines by Da Ponte are as follows:

Dove sono i bei momenti  
Di dolcezza e di piacer?  
Dove andaro i giuramenti  
Di quel labbro menzogner?

These are four lines of four iambic meters each with alternating rhymes. Mozart set them in a corresponding musical form (Example

## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

Andantino

**I**

Do ve so - no i bei mo - men - ti, di dol - ces - za e  
 A Flown for - e - ver love's sun - ny splen - dour, Now for - sa - ken and  
 B I re - mem - ber days long de - par - ted, Days when love - no  
 C Are they o - ver, those che - rished mo - ments, Hours to - geth - er so

**II**

di pia - cer, do ve an - da - ro i giu - ra - men - ti,  
 lone I mourn, he vow'd me love true and ten - der,  
 end could know; I re - mem - ber fond vows and fer - vent -  
 sweet - ly shared? Are they bro - ken, those fer - vent ple - dges

**III**

di quel lab - bro men - zo - gner, di quel lab - bro men - zo - gner,  
 Ah, those lips are now for - sworn, Ah those lips are now for - sworn!  
 All were bro - ken long a - go. All were bro - ken long a - go.  
 His de - ceit - ful lips de - clared, His de - ceit - ful lips de - clared?

**IVa**

**IVb**

Example 4. From Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*.

Translation A, by Natalie McFarren, is from the score published by Novello and Company Ltd. of London; Translation B is from the version by Edward Dent, published by Oxford University Press, London; Translation C is by Ruth and Thomas Martin, copyright 1947, 1948, 1951 by G. Schirmer, Inc., New York City. All are reprinted by permission of the publishers.

4). We see that the first three lines (I, II, III) are composed in three periods of four measures each, while the fourth line, the words of which are repeated, is set to a more extended period, consisting of twice three measures (IV, a and b). This original structure of the verse and musical form offers the basic scheme for the translation.

The question of whether or not one should also imitate the original rhymes is of secondary importance. It was Mozart's own judgment that no significant wording should be sacrificed for a bad rhyme. However, if rhyming is obtainable without paying that price for it, one should use it.

The translator will obtain the basic thoughts and expressions only by retracing the process through which the composer arrived at the music from the original words. In this example we notice that the first two lines express the longing of the Countess for her lost happiness, and the third and fourth repeat this thought at increased intensity. Whereas the third line is composed as an exact musical replica of the first, the music for the fourth makes the repetition of the words "di quel labbro menzogner" ([vows of] these deceitful lips) an expression of wonderful psychological significance: the first time (a) ascending in a sharp accentuated rhythm of dotted 16th and 32nd notes, as though the words were uttered in rising anger; the second time (b) descending in a soft musical line which reveals that although the Countess is reiterating the accusing words, she really is relenting and still holds an unchanging and forgiving feeling of love for her husband.

Analysis of further details within this structure shows that there are pauses after "Dove sono" and "i giuramenti" which would be contrary to a "correct" reading if they were not to express the deep emotion underlying the noble words. (The pauses prove also that Mozart's tempo, "Andantino," is correct, rather than the much slower interpretation usually heard in performances—because this aria is not merely a vocal number to be sung at adagio tempo; it is a true musical expression of a hurt and loving heart.

Other details that reveal how the music serves the meaning of certain words are the little embellishment of the vocal line expressing the "dolcezza" (sweetness) of the memory of former days and the *dolce* oboe melody following the word "piacer" (joy).

For the purpose of comparison, we are bringing together here three different translations of this stanza. The first (A), the one printed in the Novello score, is by Natalie McFarren. The second (B) is by Edward J. Dent and was first used in London in 1920. The third (C) is by Ruth and Thomas Martin and was made for production at the New York City Center in 1948.



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

- A. Flown forever love's sunny splendour,  
Now forsaken and lone I mourn  
Oft he vow'd me love true and tender,  
Ah, those lips are now forsworn!<sup>5</sup>
- B. I remember days long departed,  
Days when love no end could know:  
I remember fond vows and fervent—  
All were broken long ago.<sup>6</sup>
- C. Are they over, those cherished moments,  
Hours together so sweetly shared?  
Are they broken, those fervent pledges  
His deceitful lips declared?<sup>7</sup>

Example A suffers from a fault that is common to most of the older translations: the use of archaic words and phrases, often chosen in an effort to make rhymes at any cost. But when it sets the word "mourn" to the *dolce* melody, it obviously contradicts the music and makes it meaningless.

Dent's translation, Example B, employs simpler words which have the advantage of being easily understood in the theater. He forgoes the rhyme in the first and third line but does not arrive at a completely convincing accentuation in the phrase "fond vows and fervent." Both B and A disregard the fact that Da Ponte wrote and Mozart composed the sentences in the form of two longing questions, not as statements.

The Martins, in Example C, come still closer to solving the problems involved. They also omit the first rhyme, and they disregard the beauty of the longing melody in the repeat of "Dove andaro i giuramenti" by injecting the idea of broken pledges into the noble musical phrase of the third line, which in the original contrasts with the fourth line. Also, the words "lips declared" do not convey the idea and rhythm of "labbro menzogner."

These points might be considered details of minor importance, but there is one observation that is of basic significance: All three translations fail in some degree to re-create the poetic mood of the original words, which express so significantly the feelings of this wonderful woman.

But those who have tried their hand at operatic translations know

that they can almost never equal the artistic quality of the original. And even a reasonably satisfactory compromise can be a great help in the task of making opera understood.

There are translators who are not satisfied with such a compromise and feel that a translation must be poetry in its own right even at the cost of changing the meaning of the original. Others go even farther; they modernize the entire libretto, claiming thereby to bring opera closer to the American audience. This was the idea of Oscar Hammerstein II when he wrote a modern American adaptation of *Carmen* under the title of *Carmen Jones*.

In Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* the world of the Negro had proved to be a successful medium for the emotional treatment that opera requires, and Hammerstein, choosing this setting in place of the original scene among the gypsies in Spain, transferred the story to a southern American town and Chicago. Although he succeeded in achieving a stimulating book and production, one may doubt that it at all points justified his belief in the flexibility of music, as expressed in the foreword to the libretto: "My belief about words and music is that when a melody is good to hear, it can take on any color the lyric gives it."<sup>8</sup>

This is undoubtedly true in some cases; we know how Handel used the same tune for different purposes and how the melody of Offenbach's "Barcarolle" in *Tales of Hoffmann* was originally the melody of a drinking song in an operetta called *The Rhine-nixies*. But in general application, especially by lesser talents, this idea could have questionable consequences.

Even Hammerstein, despite his extraordinary ability as a lyric writer, did not always achieve a proper mating of words with music. For instance, his modernized version makes the bullfighter Escamillo into the boxer Husky Miller, and this fact alters the meaning of the music although the notes have not been changed. A look at the piano score of the refrain of the "Toreador's Song" (Example 5) will show this.

Here is a "couplet" of typical French elegance. Meilhac and Halévy's words depict the chivalrous fighter who, while he is in the battle, dreams of his sweetheart whose love awaits him as reward after his return. In close accordance with these words, Bizet wrote the music in the graceful French chanson style of the nineteenth century. There-

(avec fatuité)

*p*

To - ré - a - dor, — en gar - - del. — To - ré - a - dor! —  
 Stan' up an' fight un - til you hear de bell, — Stan' toe to toe, —

*pp*

To - ré - a - dor! — Et songe bien, oui, songe en combattant, —  
 Trade blow for blow! — Keep punchin' till you make yer punches tell, —

*cresc.* *dim.*

Qu'un oeil noir te re - gar - - - - de Et — que l'amour t'attend,  
 Show dat crowd watch-er know! — Un - til you hear dat bell,

*p* *pp* *rit. poco*

To - ré - a - dor, — L'a-mour, l'amour t'at - tend! —  
 Dat, — fi-nal bell, — Stan' up an' fight like hell! —

*leg.* *colla. voce*

Example 5. From Bizet's *Carmen*.

The English lyrics are from *Carmen Jones* by Oscar Hammerstein II, copyright 1943, 1945 by Dorothy B. Hammerstein and 1943 by Williamson Music, Inc. Reprinted by permission of Alfred A. Knopf, publisher.

fore he composed it as *pianissimo* and added at the end, where "l'amour attends" (love awaits), a sentimental *ritardando*. (Unhappily, hardly anyone has ever heard it sung the way Bizet wrote it. Our baritones seem to identify themselves with the bull rather than with its elegant fighter.)

Compare this score and these directions with the words of the "big boy" Husky:

Stan' up an' fight until you hear de bell,  
 Stan' toe to toe,  
 Trade blow fer blow,  
 Keep punchin' till you make yer punches tell,  
 Show dat crowd watcher know!  
 Until you hear dat bell,  
 Dat final bell,  
 Stan' up an' fight lik hell!

There can be little doubt that this was a grand fight, but it was the composer who was knocked out.

Although I am among those who enjoy the vitality and verve of Hammerstein's lyrics, I do not believe Bizet's music can be stretched to fit them without considerable discrepancy. Why not just go a step farther—as did Nemirovitch Dantchenko's production of *Carmencita and the Soldier* at the Moscow Art Theater years ago?

Since the book of *Carmen Jones* does not pretend to be that of the opera *Carmen*, but a new version "based on Meilhac's and Halévy's adaptation of Prosper Mérimée's *Carmen*, it would be perfectly legitimate to make a new musical adaptation corresponding to the new text. Then the proper musical balance would be restored, with jazz rhythms and an orchestration fitting the Negro world. Every age has exercised its right to modernize the classics, in opera as well as in the theater. Richard Wagner adapted Gluck's *Iphigenia in Aulis* to his taste; Richard Strauss composed new versions of Gluck's *Iphigenia in Tauris* and Mozart's *Idomeneo*.

Hammerstein has recognized this problem by saying: "'Carmen Jones' is not the answer to your prayers or mine for opera in English." It is, however, "an indication, if not positive proof, that opera in English may be popular if the lyrics are singable, understandable, and dramatic. A more complete proof would be an adaptation of the



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

original, keeping the scene in Spain and all details the same except for the exigencies of translation. Some day someone who understands music and theatre will write a straight English version of some opera, and some courageous director will force the singers to act in a sensible manner—and the result will be astounding!”<sup>9</sup>

There will always, of necessity, be problems involved in the translation or the adaptation of old operas. Full artistic freedom exists only in the third form of opera in English: native opera written for our surroundings and our time. In this field imitation of the old forms will not be enough. But the study of the older works, of the relationship in them between words and music, of the techniques of the librettists and composers who created them, can provide highly valuable guidance. From the ground thus tilled modern writers and composers will raise a sturdy crop of new operas and new creative forms.

But whether by translation, adaptation, or new works, the use of the vernacular will be an essential element in producing opera in America as musical drama of the people.

# *The sponsorship of* OPERA

**GIVEN** the completed opera, book and music, what is the first essential for its production on the stage before the audience for whom the author and composer intended it? An organization to handle its performance, and for this purpose—money. Money or the reasonably certain prospect of it. Money to pay for the time and effort and equipment it will take to turn those black marks on white paper into the flesh-and-blood embodiment the creators imagined.

During August 1948 I was enjoying a vacation visit in Austria and Italy. One afternoon in Arturo Toscanini's Milan home, the ever energetic Maestro, Mario Labroca, then the artistic director at La Scala, and I discussed the disturbing news that had just arrived: The Metropolitan Opera, threatened with a deficit of \$230,000 and unable to face further production costs, had canceled its 1948-49 season.

To an Italian or an Austrian this seemed to be a more world-shaking event than the Berlin airlift or the threatening war in Palestine which at that time filled the newspaper headlines, for opera means more than bread to these Europeans. Their love for opera was demonstrated by

## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

the huge amounts which the Italian government, politically and economically hard pressed as it was, had just granted to its leading opera companies in Milan, Rome, Florence, Naples, Turin, Venice, Bologna, Genoa, Palermo, and Cagliari.

Out of the total subsidy of 1,300,000,000 lire (equaling \$2,260,000 at that time) La Scala was to receive 335,000,000 lire (\$582,000), and the opera house in Rome 330,000,000 lire (\$574,000) plus 80,000,000 lire (\$139,000) for its summer open-air season at the Terme di Caracalla.

Having just come from occupied Salzburg and Vienna, I was able to add that Salzburg at the summer's festival just concluded had sponsored five new productions, including a modern opera, *Le Vin Herbe* by Frank Martin, in addition to *Fidelio*, *Orfeo*, *Figaro*, and the *Abduction*. And the general manager of the state theaters in Vienna, a city still in ruins and having to get along on poor food rations, had showed me his plan for twelve new operatic productions (including the ambitious *Palestrina* by Hans Pfitzner) in Vienna's two opera houses during the forthcoming season—all made possible by the generous government grant of 8,294,300 schillings.

Later I learned that Zurich, Switzerland, that year granted to its municipal theater 1,400,000 Swiss francs (\$350,000), while the two opera houses in Paris received a subsidy of 400 million French francs (\$1,330,000). And during the 1947-48 season the Royal Opera in Stockholm, Sweden, had a government subsidy of 1,000,000 crowns, of which the city of Stockholm gave one tenth.

Even England, for the first time since the Tudors, began during World War II to give opera continuous state financial support. First the Council for the Encouragement of Music and Arts, set up under the direction of the Board of Education and financed by the Treasury, then the Arts Council, granted financial assistance to both Covent Garden and Sadler's Wells, which give opera and ballet for eight or nine months of the year. The amount of this state subsidy has gradually increased. Covent Garden, which was nationalized in July 1948, received for the 1948-49 season \$480,000, Sadler's Wells \$140,000.

But on the American continents, only Buenos Aires comes near maintaining this European tradition by granting its opera house, the Teatro Colon, a yearly subsidy amounting, during the 1949-50 season, to \$1,673,600.

## SPONSORSHIP

Although we need not have been quite so concerned that afternoon in Milan, because the board of directors of the Metropolitan later reversed its decision to cancel the 1948-49 season, the crisis did illuminate sharply the problem that is chronic in the situation of grand opera in America. For once more the problem was not really solved; it was only temporarily got over by such makeshift solutions as shortening the New York season from eighteen to sixteen weeks and discarding plans for any new productions that year.

The official statement announcing the 1948-49 season of the Metropolitan made this clear: "Despite the fact that the House is practically sold out at every performance (and this has been true for four straight years) our box-office receipts from 7000 subscribers and the general public are not sufficient to meet the constantly mounting costs in the complicated business of producing Grand Opera. It would be a mistake to assume from today's announcement that the major problems of the Metropolitan have been solved. There are many pressing questions—both immediate and long range—for which solutions must be found before the public can be assured of the permanent future of this essential cultural institution on anything approaching a self-supporting basis."<sup>1</sup>

It may be instructive to take a look at the financial record of America's biggest grand opera company.

During the 1947-48 season, the sixty-third since its opening in 1883, the Metropolitan employed 575 persons. These included 105 artists, a chorus of 78, an orchestra (including assistant conductors) of 106, a ballet of 39, 13 conductors, stage directors, and managerial officials, 74 stagehands, an office personnel of 21, 17 in the wardrobe department, and 122 box-office men, ushers, ticket-takers, and porters.

During the eighteen weeks of its regular New York season and an additional one in Holy Week, it produced twenty-eight different operas in four different languages (Italian, German, French, and English). The New York season was followed by an eight-week spring tour, which for the first time in forty years took the company as far as Los Angeles. By transporting 300 people, along with scenery, costumes, properties, electrical equipment, and musical instruments, in two special trains over more than 9000 miles, sixty performances of twenty-two operas were given in sixteen cities.

Attendance at all these performances, both in New York and on



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

tour, amounted to 97 per cent of capacity, with advance subscriptions covering 75 per cent of the ticket sale. To this basic income was added revenue from broadcasts, recordings, concessions, and rentals, plus \$125,000 raised and contributed by the Opera Guild to pay for the new scenery for Wagner's *Ring* that season—making a total income of \$3,024,688.78.

This was about \$195,000 more than the income of the preceding season, but the cost of labor and services was \$353,100 higher in 1947-48, and this item, excluding executive and clerical salaries, accounted for 71 per cent of the total expenditures, which were \$3,258,045.86. Hence the deficit which, after three seasons "in the black," almost led to cancellation of the following season.

Actually, the deficit was a good deal less than it might have been because since 1943 the cultural activities part of the Metropolitan building had been exempted from real estate taxes. This exemption, by action of the state legislature and, after negotiation, the city government, meant a saving of some \$100,000 a year.

It is interesting to note that the rise in salaries and wages more than accounted for the deficit. During the five years from 1943 to 1948, the percentage of the revenues required to meet the payroll had risen from 68 to 82 per cent, and during the 1947-48 season the payroll was almost equal to the entire income from ticket sales both in New York City and on tour.<sup>2</sup>

A public campaign to raise \$250,000 was announced in February 1949, and the people did not let the Metropolitan down. But the 1948-49 season, even without any new productions, ended with a new deficit of \$325,000. This was almost exactly equal to the year's total for the 20 per cent federal amusement tax, and hope of breaking even ran high when a bill for the repeal of this tax passed the House of Representatives in the spring of 1950 and seemed sure of passage in the Senate. But the outbreak of the Korean war put an end to that pleasant prospect for the time being, and Rudolf Bing began his first season in the fall of 1950 with the preceding year's deficit hanging over his head. Following the example of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the association sent a letter to the subscribers asking them for voluntary contributions to make up the amount.

Although the insecure state of the Metropolitan's finances had been no secret for many seasons, it was now ominously clear that more far-

## SPONSORSHIP

reaching solutions of the problem must be found if the organization is to be placed on solid ground, as befits its national and international importance.

Actually, a review of the Metropolitan's financial history from 1910 to 1950 shows that its deficits have been extremely modest in comparison with the subsidies granted to major opera companies in Europe.

Gatti-Casazza, the famous manager of the Metropolitan in its palmier days, has said in his *Memories of the Opera* that the association "from 1910, when I first had complete control, to the depression that followed the stockmarket debacle of 1929, without financial subsidy of any kind, was more than self-supporting. I believe that this record is unique in operatic history. During the self-sufficient seasons we created and built up a reserve fund. At its peak, it reached \$1,100,000. This fund was enough to balance later seasons made difficult by the depression."<sup>3</sup>

By the end of the 1931-32 season, however, this fund was gone, and for 1932-33 the directors, for the first time, contributed a guarantee of \$150,000. In 1933 it became necessary to appeal to the people for funds and the first public campaign was organized, raising \$300,000. In 1934 a second appeal had to be made, which netted \$62,000. The Juilliard Foundation, coming to the rescue of the Metropolitan in these critical seasons, had pledged \$40,000 in this second campaign and subscribed \$150,000 for the 1935-36 season, the first one under Edward Johnson's management.

In 1939-40 came the campaign that raised \$1,057,000 for the purchase of the building, and another nationwide drive during the Diamond Jubilee season of 1943-44 raised \$336,580. The fifth public campaign was the one in 1949 that brought in about \$250,000.

If we add to these amounts approximately \$315,000 which the Opera Guild contributed in addition to its important part in the campaigns, \$30,000 given by the Northern Ohio Opera Association, and some \$200,000 in other donations listed in the official Statements of Operations, we get a grand total of contributions, as far as is publicly known, amounting to \$2,850,000. This is an average of only \$150,000 annually from the 1932-33 season to the end of the 1949-50 season. And if we deduct the funds raised for the purchase of the building, we have a yearly average of only \$100,000 needed to cover the operating losses.

This is certainly a modest amount in comparison with the figures

## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

given earlier in the chapter for the government subsidies granted to European opera companies.

Special note must be taken of the invaluable aid in enlisting public interest and support rendered by the Metropolitan Opera Guild. The purpose of this organization, as stated in the Certificate of Incorporation of March 28, 1936, is "to develop and cultivate a wider public interest in opera, to further musical education and appreciation, and to promote the activities of the Metropolitan Opera Association." *Opera News*, the guild magazine edited by Mrs. John DeWitt Peltz, has become a nationwide stimulant of interest in opera.

The guild grew from 1100 members in the first year to about 40,000 in 1949. In addition to three classes of supporting members (donors, \$100; contributing, \$30; sustaining, \$10) there are "national members" who pay \$4 dues, which entitles them to receive the issues of *Opera News*. Affiliated local groups, such as those in San Francisco, Southern California (headquarters in Los Angeles), New Orleans, and Atlanta, help to create interest in the Metropolitan throughout the country. We shall see later how such local opera guilds are becoming instrumental in promoting opera companies in their own communities.

Up to 1949 the Metropolitan Opera Guild had not only contributed some \$885,000 in the campaigns of 1940, 1944, and 1949, but had also provided the management with funds for many of its new productions. These sums brought its total contributions to about one million dollars.

The guild is doing much for the future of opera by its work among school children. By purchasing matinee performances at the usual prices and selling them to the students at rates from \$.75 to \$3.60, making up the balance from a Special Projects Fund, it sponsored fifty-five student matinees between 1937 and the end of the 1948-49 season. This enabled 346,000 students from junior and senior high schools in New York City and nearby communities to attend the opera.

An advisory committee of music supervisors meets periodically with the guild officials to plan the educational program. Teachers prepare the students to understand the opera, musically and dramatically, by classroom lectures, recordings, and slides. In 1941 a Student Council of the Metropolitan Opera Guild was formed by representatives from the student bodies of 150 schools to further student participation and exchange of ideas between the guild and the student audience.

## SPONSORSHIP

If the country's biggest and best known opera company is having such a struggle to keep afloat, what must be the plight of other American companies that do not have the Metropolitan's nationwide prestige or its special resources, such as network broadcasting and contributions by the Opera Guild? They can continue to operate only by limiting their repertoire to the sure-fire operas and by reducing to a minimum their personnel, the length of their seasons, the scope of their productions, the number of their rehearsals.

Against such odds the San Francisco Opera Association under Gaetano Merola has continuously maintained a high standard. It has been in existence since 1923, giving its performances since 1932 in the new War Memorial Opera House, which is the first municipally owned and operated opera house in the United States. Its annual local season takes place in the fall and lasts five weeks. A tour, which usually ends in a week or more of guest performances in Los Angeles, extends the company's activity to a total of seven to nine weeks.

Over the period between 1944 and 1950, from 38 to 52 performances of 12 to 19 operas were given annually, 22 to 31 of which were in San Francisco. All leading artists, conductors, and stage directors are imported, but the chorus is local and the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra is used—a rare example of a major American opera company employing the local symphony orchestra, although this is common practice in Europe.

The War Memorial Opera House is a technically well-equipped modern opera theater seating 3286, with standing room for 300 more. The opera association rents the theater from the city, but the city in turn makes an annual contribution to the company from its municipal Publicity and Advertising Fund. The first such civic grant, in 1942, was \$12,000; since 1943 it has been \$15,000 a year—against a total budget that for the 1948 season ran to about \$800,000.

To meet its expenses the association receives, in addition to this municipal allotment and the proceeds from ticket sales, donations in varying amounts from local business firms, the net income from its concert series (since 1939 it has operated a Concert Division under Director Merola and Business Manager Paul Posz), and miscellaneous sums from such sources as box-office rentals and libretto sales. Deficits are met by pro-rata assessment of the guarantors: the subscribers to



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

seats in boxes, orchestra, and grand tier are obliged to guarantee fifty dollars per seat against any over-all loss for the season.

The San Francisco Opera achieves a high level of performance by using first-class casts and orchestra, a youthful chorus, and new scenery, mostly by Armando Agnini, but I can attest from my guest activity with the company for a number of seasons that, although it has offered several productions of its own design, in many cases its operation was made possible only by the fact that it engaged entire casts of Metropolitan artists, as well as other experienced singers, who were able to carry out their performances with the barest minimum of rehearsal time. Likewise, the scenery and the staging of many of its operas are not original, but have to follow established operatic routine in order to save money.

The financial conditions of the other major opera companies is less satisfactory, by far. The Chicago Civic Opera Company had to end its activities after its 1946 season, and Cincinnati's Summer Opera in the outdoor pavilion at Zoological Gardens has continued its six weeks' season since 1935 only with great difficulty.

Although the Cincinnati company was granted tax exemption by both city and state and a guarantee fund of from \$24,000 to \$35,000 was made available by individual donors, the over-all budget of about \$200,000 in 1948 was too close for comfort, since a complete sellout of the six weeks' season would have provided an income of just \$234,000. In 1949 a premature closing of the season was averted at the last minute only by the efforts of the director, Oscar F. Hild, and a group of opera-loving citizens who provided more than \$50,000 to cover the threatened deficit. The picture looked brighter the following year, when the season ended with a profit. But strict limitations of rehearsal time are the rule.

Similarly, only severe tightening of the financial and artistic belt has enabled Alfredo Salmaggi's "Popular Price Grand Opera" to continue as a self-supporting organization in New York, where it gives operas every Saturday night at the Brooklyn Academy of Music during eight months of the year and at Triborough Stadium on Randall's Island during the three summer months.

Salmaggi, who from 1933 to 1939 presented year-round opera at the New York Hippodrome at prices ranging from twenty-five cents to ninety-nine cents, has since 1943 given between forty and fifty per-

## SPONSORSHIP

formances annually, at a top price of two dollars (plus tax) in Brooklyn and at a uniform price of one dollar (plus tax) at the Triborough Stadium.

Perhaps even this brief survey is enough to show why there were only five resident opera companies in the United States able to continue operating over the five-year period from 1944 to 1949—companies equipped and able, that is, to give a minimum of thirty performances a season in their home city. In order of number of performances given at their place of residence, these are: (1) the Metropolitan Opera, (2) the New York City Center Opera (which because of its new civic setup we shall discuss later under "Community Opera"), (3) Salmaggi's Opera in New York, (4) the Cincinnati Summer Opera, and (5) the San Francisco Opera.

If we consider the total number of performances given, including those outside the place of residence, the order varies slightly (the San Francisco Opera moves into third place), but it is the same five resident companies that stay in the picture for the entire period. During these years the Chicago and Boston companies disappeared and Philadelphia's La Scala and the National Opera Association in Los Angeles emerged. But only two of these major companies give more than fifty performances annually, either at their place of residence or in total.

This is hardly an impressive record for grand opera in the United States. Especially when it is considered in contrast to the increasing interest of the American public in opera as demonstrated by the huge listening audience for the Metropolitan Opera broadcasts, the rapid growth of the New York City Center Opera, and the increasing success of tours of the Metropolitan Opera and of companies organized for touring purposes only.

Among these touring companies Fortuno Gallo's San Carlo Opera, founded in 1911, ranks first in number of performances—although, probably because of increasing expenses, this number was progressively reduced during the four seasons from 1944 to 1948. From October 1944 to October 1945 the company gave 221 performances in 79 cities; from October 1947 to October 1948 its record was 108 performances in 28 cities.<sup>4</sup> Gallo has managed to take opera to cities and people that would otherwise never have seen it, and this fact undoubtedly offsets the economy of production he necessarily practices.

Whereas Gallo traveled with a repertoire of from thirteen to fifteen

## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

standard operas, the Charles L. Wagner Opera Company, organized in 1940, has concentrated on just one work during each fall or spring season. With a cast of youthful American singers, this company has traveled in two air-conditioned busses with one twenty-eight-foot trailer truck, and has been booked for six or seven performances a week in one-night stands in cities from 100 to 350 miles apart; it has played in as many as 120 different theaters during a total season of eighteen or nineteen weeks.

Wagner's operas have been staged by Desiré Defrere. Scenery of a flexible type was used so that it could be adapted to either the biggest auditoriums or stages as small as twenty-two feet wide and eighteen feet deep. Serious operas are done in the original language, comic operas in English, for Charles Wagner believes "the people want to laugh in English and cry in a foreign tongue."

That this touring company, which *Time* magazine nicknamed "Opera-à-la-cart," has found an eager audience is proved by the fact that forty-seven cities booked the company for nine consecutive years—and during the 1948-49 season an audience estimated at 350,000 attended 119 Wagner company performances of *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Barber of Seville*. By streamlining his production and business methods, Wagner has made his company profitable. He insists that "it does not require half a dozen managers and assistants to run a first-class opera company. That is, provided they go to bed in due season, and get up in time to do business."

Among other opera companies whose major activities lie in touring, we may list, according to the number of their performances given during the years from 1944 to 1949, the Philadelphia La Scala, the National Grand Opera Company of Giorgio d'Andria, the Boston Grand Opera Company, and the New Pacific Opera Company. The Metropolitan and the San Francisco Opera should also figure in this rating because of the importance of their tours.

Playing as much as possible in huge auditoriums (such as Cleveland's, seating about 9000, and the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles, which seats 6645) and usually on a financial guarantee furnished by local managers and committees, which protects the visiting company from any risk, these tours not only increase the prestige of the company and lengthen the contracts of its employees, but also are essential to defray the expenses of their local seasons.

## SPONSORSHIP

Such tours are rare with European companies. The artistic quality of the performances is questionable in view of the poorly equipped stages they must sometimes use and the lack of rehearsals to permit proper adjustments. However, the enthusiasm of the packed houses, in cities that have no opera companies of their own and rarely get an opportunity to enjoy good guest performances, adds a warm personal reward to such enterprises.

We take the capacity attendance and the enthusiasm that greet the touring opera companies to be proof of the genuine interest of the American people in opera. If we are right, then some form of sponsorship should be found to meet this interest—to put the existence of the major opera companies on a financial basis stable enough to permit their proper artistic operation and development.

As we have seen, public assistance is often given in the form of guarantee funds and donations by culturally minded citizens and organizations, but this private help is scarcely ever enough to make up the difference between the income from ticket sales and the requirements of a really artistic operation. And it is almost always given for only one season at a time, which makes the necessary long-range planning impossible. American opera companies do not work as yet on a basis of civic sponsorship stable enough to guarantee their continuous artistic existence as part of the community life.

Light opera, grand opera's popular sister, is better off in this respect. Performed in outdoor theaters during the summer months, it has found in several American cities a pattern of operation that has established it solidly within their civic life. The popularity of its repertoire, presentation in English, an economical system of repeat performances of the same work on consecutive days, and the great seating capacity of the outdoor theaters, all have contributed to a sound system of organization.

The St. Louis Municipal Opera had an inauspicious beginning in 1919, when torrential rains washed out its opening performance of *Robin Hood*, but it has a solid record as a musical organization. Under John Kennedy's direction, it presents eleven or twelve light operas, all in English, in nightly performances for three summer months, each work being given for at least one week. The performances take place in a theater holding nearly 12,000 people, at prices ranging from \$.35



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

to \$2.60, including government tax. Approximately 1000 guarantors each year pledge a fund of \$100,000 to underwrite any deficit on the \$600,000 budget, but so far there have been only two losing seasons and the guarantors for those were repaid from profits of subsequent seasons. So nobody lost a penny during the thirty-one years from 1919 to 1949.

Attendance figures are enormous. The souvenir book issued for the Twenty-fifth Anniversary in 1943 listed the attendance of 13,738,966 people during the first twenty-four seasons.

The St. Louis Municipal Opera employs more than 400 people and owns one of the most modern stages in America, 90 by 115 feet, with an additional 8000 square feet concealed from view of the audience to facilitate moving the massive scenery. It is equipped with a revolving stage and other modern technical devices. The city of St. Louis allows the opera association the free use of this theater—which completes the picture of a well-established civic musical organization.

Of more recent date but also operating on a sound basis are the Los Angeles Civic Light Opera Association headed by Edwin Lester; the Memphis Open-Air Theatre, sponsored by the Junior Chamber of Commerce and by a roster of 350 citizens and firms who subscribe up to \$100 each; and the Starlight Operetta on the grounds of the Texas State Fair in Dallas. Under the direction of C. R. Meeker Jr., this Texas company has been giving seventy performances of nine or ten works during ten weeks in the Dallas outdoor auditorium seating 5239. It could boast of having the “only mechanized outdoor stage in the nation involving five moving stages” and has been exempted from taxes by the state.

Similar light opera companies exist in Pittsburgh; Detroit; San Diego, California; Birmingham, Alabama; Atlanta, Georgia; San Antonio, Texas; Little Rock, Arkansas; Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Especially interesting because of its educational work is the Cain Park Theatre, sponsored since 1938 by the city of Cleveland Heights, Ohio. Under the supervision of Dina Rees Evans, who is also head of the drama department of the Cleveland Heights high school, it includes a Children's Theatre School and an apprentice system in which it accepts college and university students of dramatic art as co-workers. It also supports the Cain Park Light Opera Unit, which since 1940 has developed under Handel Wadsworth from a small group of

## SPONSORSHIP

young Cleveland singers to a company of about one hundred and fifty singers and dancers who perform three operas or operettas during a ten-week season.

All these light opera companies occasionally perform also some of the more popular grand operas and thereby bridge a gap between the two related operatic fields which in this country has become unnecessarily wide.

We have implied or referred in passing to some of the unhappy effects of financial want and instability in the operatic world, but more specific and extended description may make the situation clearer.

To preserve the precarious balance of the budget, the managements of our opera companies feel they must concentrate the potential audience within the smallest possible operating costs. One result is short, much too short, seasons.

Between 1908 and 1932-33 the Metropolitan's New York season ran from 20 to 24 weeks, but during the depression years of the middle 1930s it sank to only 14 weeks. And during subsequent years, at least through the 1950-51 season, it rose only twice to as much as 20 weeks (exclusive of Holy Week performances and the spring tour).

But even this length is exceptional, for the next-ranking resident company, the New York City Center Opera, was in operation during the 1948-49 season for 8 weeks in the fall and 6 weeks in the spring, plus a guest season of 3 weeks in Chicago. The San Francisco Opera is third in line with 5 weeks in San Francisco and 2 to 4 on tour, then Cincinnati with its 6 weeks' summer season. The seasons of the other resident companies are still shorter.

A good many of the frustrating handicaps in opera production arise from this fact of short seasons. The opera company cannot command the exclusive services of its personnel because it cannot offer them employment for enough of the year to give them an adequate living or financial security. Even the Metropolitan, therefore, tends to become sometimes a sideline with its artists, sometimes merely a stepping-stone to the concert stage, the motion picture, radio, or television. And the deplorable lack of extended season's contracts and employment security gives rise to union policies which, while understandable under the circumstances, nevertheless create all sorts of difficulties because they do not take account of the existing financial and artistic realities.

## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

In cementing to some extent the shaky structure of the operatic budget, the sale of "subscription" or "season" tickets is of major importance because it guarantees in advance a given number of performances. For forty years the Metropolitan adhered to a schedule of five "regular" subscription series (on Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday nights and Saturday afternoons) and one "popular" series (on Saturday evenings). To these were added a varying number of Tuesday night performances in Philadelphia and of nonsubscription nights and benefit matinees in New York.

The proceeds from the subscription sale has provided an advance income of about 75 per cent of the season's total—from an average of 100 houses out of an average total of 130 New York performances. This is a considerable bolstering of the budget.

For the 1950-51 season Rudolf Bing announced two changes in the subscription system. First, the five regular series could be taken either, as previously, for eighteen performances in as many consecutive weeks, or for nine performances in alternating weeks. This latter offer was made to attract those customers who cannot or do not want to attend every week. Second, a new series was introduced, offering ten performances, given on Tuesdays, at a 10 per cent reduction. (In the regular subscription series there is no reduction from the single ticket price.) This new series was made possible by giving fewer Tuesday performances in Philadelphia—a change of policy suggested by the increased costs of transportation. It may foreshadow similar considerations regarding the spring tour.

The San Francisco Opera also relies on advance sale of season tickets. It offers one "popular" series of five performances and a "regular" series that compresses attendance at ten performances within the five weeks of the local season.

After the advance sale of tickets to the subscription performances is closed, the individual sale of the remaining seats begins. During the 1949-50 season the top prices for single performance seats ranged from \$7.50 at the Metropolitan to \$3.00 at the New York City Center Opera and \$2.40 at Salmaggi's Opera in Brooklyn.

Another consequence of the endeavor to ensure the largest possible attendance is the great number of different operas given in one season. In 1948-49 the Metropolitan presented 25 operas during its 16-week

## SPONSORSHIP

season, San Francisco performed 19 during 5 weeks, Cincinnati 17 during 6 weeks.

The number of performances in the longest subscription series, of course, determines the minimum number of different operas that must be given, but beyond that we have to take the word of our managers, based on their box-office experience, that offering more operas with fewer repeat performances—a procedure that raises costs and handicaps the artistic preparation of the productions—is more profitable than presenting fewer operas with more repeat performances.

The number of operas given at the Metropolitan has been gradually reduced. From a record of 43 different operas during the 24-week season under Gatti-Casazza in 1923–24, the number went down under Edward Johnson from a maximum of 37 during the 16-week season of 1939–40 to a low of 24 in his last season, which ran for 18 regular weeks. In Bing's first year 21 operas (including *Cavalleria* and *Pagliacci* on a double bill) were given in a regular season of 20 weeks plus two additional nonsubscription weeks.

To secure the maximum attendance, our managers feel they have to rely on the sure-fire operas. Although during recent years the musical taste of American operagoers has developed so that works like Richard Strauss's *Ariadne* and modern operas by Gian-Carlo Menotti and Benjamin Britten have found increased favor with them, the repertoire of our leading companies is still built chiefly on the popular drawing cards: *Carmen*, *Traviata*, *Aïda*, and the rest. Even well-established but technically demanding works like Wagner's *Ring* and *Parsifal* and Mozart's *Magic Flute* appear regularly only on the Metropolitan stage.

In my youth in Vienna I regularly heard beautiful performances of such operas; Franz Schalk and Richard Strauss considered it their duty to keep masterworks like these continuously in the repertoire in spite of half-empty houses for them. But American managers could not afford such a policy. The San Francisco Opera Association gave its first performances of *Parsifal* and *The Magic Flute* in 1950, its twenty-eighth season. Experiments with modern operas are rarely undertaken, so that one might think the operatic repertoire had come to an end with Richard Strauss's *Rosenkavalier*, written before World War I, if not with Puccini's *Madame Butterfly* of 1904. Whereas in fact there exists a considerable body of good newer operas.



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

Under Gatti-Casazza (from 1908 to 1935) the Metropolitan produced a great number of modern operas, including fourteen operas and two ballets by American composers. The list begins with Converse's *Pipe of Desire* in 1910 (the first opera by an American composer to be performed at the Metropolitan) and includes the successful "lyric dramas" *The King's Henchman* (1927) and *Peter Ibbetson* (1931) by Deems Taylor as well as Louis Gruenberg's *Emperor Jones* (1933).

Gatti's successor, Edward Johnson, steering the Metropolitan through financially difficult years, was rarely in a position to afford the risk of producing new works. During the fifteen seasons of his regime (1935-50) six modern operas were produced, five of which were by American composers. Among these were three one-act operas: Menotti's *Amelia Goes to the Ball* and *The Island God* and Bernard Rogers' *The Warrior*. The last of the contemporary works produced under Johnson was Benjamin Britten's *Peter Grimes*.

The New York City Center Opera has premiered some modern works, among them *Troubled Island* by William Grant Still in 1949, but the other major companies have practically abandoned the idea of giving any new operas.

So a good deal of modern opera literature is as yet unknown to the American operatic stage. Among these works are several by Richard Strauss: his fairy-tale opera *Die Frau ohne Schatten* (The Woman without a Shadow, 1919) and *Arabella* (1933), both to texts by Hofmannsthal; the comedy *Intermezzo* (1924), for which Strauss wrote his own libretto; *Die Schweigsame Frau* (The Silent Woman, 1935), a comic opera adapted from Ben Jonson by Stefan Zweig; *Der Friedenstag* (Peace Day, 1938) and the "bucolic tragedy" *Daphne* (1938), both to texts by Joseph Gregor; the "conversation piece" *Capriccio*; and *Die Liebe der Danae* (The Love of Danae), first performed in Buenos Aires in 1948.

Furthermore, America has neglected pioneer works such as Schoenberg's monodrama *Erwartung* (Expectation, 1909); Bartók's one-act *Duke Bluebeard's Castle* (1911); the operas by Busoni, among them *Arlecchino* (1918); Hindemith's *Cadillac* (1926), *Neues vom Tage* (News of the Day, 1929), and *Mathis der Maler* (Mathis the Painter, 1935), which, according to the composer, stands for "the embodiment of problems, wishes, and doubts which have occupied the minds of all

## SPONSORSHIP

serious artists from remote times" in a likeness based on the life of the painter of the famous Isenheim altar screen, Mathis Grunewald.

Also in this category of modern operas unknown to the American stage belong Krenek's *Das Leben des Orest* (The Life of Orestes, 1930); most of Kurt Weill's operas, among them *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahogany*; Milhaud's *Christophe Colomb*; the operas by Janaček and Korngold; Pfitzner's *Palestrina*; Wolf-Ferrari's *Quattro Rusteghi* (The Four Rude Fellows); Ernest Bloch's *Macbeth*; and Prokofiev's eleven scenes from Tolstoi's *War and Peace*. Alban Berg's *Wozzeck* has not been heard on the stage since its performance under Stokowski in 1931, although a concert performance under Mitropoulos in New York in 1951 met with outstanding success and produced a general clamor for production at the Met.

To the contemporary American composers who have already written successful grand operas and those others who are working in the field of the lyric theater (we shall meet them in the chapter "Opera on Broadway"), can now be added, as potential composers of new operas living in this country, a goodly number of European operatic composers of high reputation, many of whom have become American citizens. Among them are Bloch, Brand, Hindemith, Krenek, Milhaud, Stravinsky, Toch, and Weinberger.

An enormous reservoir of operatic talent is remaining unused because the precarious situation of grand opera today offers it no outlet, no incentive.

In part, of course, this difficulty stems from public disinclination to attend performances of modern works—whether that disinclination is real or merely assumed to exist.

The word *modern* has only relative significance in any case. Richard Strauss, when his choice of *Der Rosenkavalier* following the "modern" treatment of *Elektra* caused vehement comment, complained to my father about the criticism he was receiving for his alleged inclination to sensationalism. Was not Mozart deserving of the same criticism, Strauss argued, when he picked the most up-to-date subjects of his time for his operatic books—revolutionary social ideas for *The Marriage of Figaro*, libertinism for *Don Giovanni*, the liberal ideas of Freemasonry for *The Magic Flute*?

Operas created now fittingly reflect the interests and ideas of our

## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

own day, even when they are garbed in stories of earlier periods. They appropriately make use of the rich resources of American folklore or subjects of drama from our daily life, including modern machinery. The fate of the returning soldier will interest the American audience more than the loves of an ancient god. There are also great possibilities for new festive mass operas that deal with the destinies of whole peoples as Handel did in his oratorios.

But our composers are not likely to create such operas in any numbers until they have the incentive of a reasonably certain chance of seeing their works performed.

These, then, are some of the organizational problems hampering the development of opera in America: the lack of adequate financial support with all the instability and shoestring operation this entails, the fewness of major companies, short seasons, the excessive number of operas to be performed each season, a static repertoire.

Resulting from or added to these operating difficulties are the problems that frustrate and handicap those concerned with the performance of opera. For these we need another chapter.

# *From rehearsal to* CURTAIN

A **GOOD-SIZED** opera company is an intricate piece of machinery, and its proper functioning depends not only on the artists whose names appear on the billboards, but equally on those numerous behind-the-scenes employees of whose work the public is scarcely aware.

The usual form of organization in the major resident opera companies in America is that of an "Association," represented by a board of directors, trustees, or governors. Mostly these are prominent businessmen and civic leaders. Through an executive committee and a group of officers—usually a chairman of the board, a president, two vice-presidents, a treasurer, and a secretary—the board takes the responsibility for the operation of the organization and attention to the public interests involved.

The board engages the general director or manager who is to direct the artistic and financial operations. In collaboration with the board and often with the assistance of a business manager and an artistic secretary, the director establishes the general policy concerning the length of the season, subscription series, and admission prices. He conducts negotiations with the various unions concerning minimum num-



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

bers of employees and wages. He works out the season's repertoire, taking great care to choose and space the operas wisely and remembering always Verdi's advice to Gatti-Casazza in 1899:

"Read most at-ten-tive-ly (emphasizing each syllable) the reports of the box-of-fice. These whether you like it or not, are the only documents which measure success or failure, and they admit of no argument, and represent not mere opinions, but facts. If the public comes the object is attained. If not . . . The theatre is intended to be full, and not empty. That's something you must always remember."<sup>1</sup>

Again heeding Verdi's golden words that "to achieve success, you need operas that suit the singers and also singers that suit the operas,"<sup>2</sup> the manager engages the leading singers in careful balance with his repertoire and supplements their roster with other singers to serve as understudies and to take the smaller but no less important roles.

The manager must also take pains in selecting his staff of conductors, stage directors, technical director, and chorus and ballet masters together with their assistants, because rehearsal time is costly and only men of experience are able to work well under the stress of limited time. With the assistance of the conductors, he chooses the members of the orchestra, with the advice of the chorus master the members of the chorus, with the help of the ballet master those of the ballet. In consultation with the stage directors, he engages the designers of scenery and costumes for new productions, also the stage manager. The technical director assists him in completing the staff of the technical, wardrobe, and make-up departments.

The three "heads" of the technical department—chief carpenter, electrician, and property man—in turn engage their personnel, a librarian takes charge of the musical material, while the business manager completes the office and box-office staff and engages the house manager, who in turn hires the ushers and porters.

Despite the valuable aid to be expected from the opera guild in soliciting the interest of the public, the company manager takes special care to organize a good press department, since relations with the newspapers, magazines, and other media of public information are of great importance.

All in all, no wonder Gatti-Casazza said it took the full experience of seventeen previous years of management to enable him to direct the

## REHEARSAL TO CURTAIN

artistic and technical machinery of the Metropolitan Opera. He felt the operatic manager must be both idealist and realist, Don Quixote and Sancho Panza. He must listen to advice and accept criticism, but never go beyond practical circumstances. "The theatre is a little like politics: every one considers himself equipped to have an opinion and to express it. But if it is not difficult to judge the merits of a performance and its interpreters, it is extremely difficult to give an account of an organization as complex, varied, and diverse in its elements as an opera company."<sup>3</sup>

Nor, he might have added, is it easy to move surely and with tranquillity through the higgledy-piggledy world of the artists who make the performance. That world is a curious mixture of idealism and egotism, genius and stupidity, artistic temperament and ill temper, unselfish generosity and petty intrigue, conceit and inferiority complex. It is a world of all children, who have devoted their entire beings to an irrational life in castles of music and make-believe.

Opera is a combination of all the arts—music, drama, dance, and the fine arts—and each of these elements has to suppress a part of its own rights in an uneasy truce. It is little wonder that each of them tends to go its independent way, to consider itself the star of the piece, to show off its glamorous artifices, at no matter what cost to the others or to the effect of the whole.

Richard Wagner was the first modern opera producer to succeed in achieving an organic operatic production by systematically compelling the several elements of production to subordinate themselves to the common goal. His genius made Bayreuth the model of operatic production. His conductors and assistant conductors—Hans Richter, Hermann Levi, Felix Mottl, Anton Seidl—carried his ideas to the other operatic stages of Europe, where the idea of a unified operatic production was transferred to the works of other composers such as Mozart, Verdi, and Richard Strauss.

Gustav Mahler's ideas in Vienna were continued by Bruno Walter and extended to the Salzburg Festival. Toscanini created an organic style in Milan. Fritz Schuch, followed by Fritz Reiner and Fritz Busch, did the same in Dresden. And then conductors like Seidl, Mottl, Mahler, Toscanini, Bodanzky, Reiner, Walter, Busch, and Stiedry, together with their stage directors, carried this tradition to America.

## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

It was Toscanini who at the Metropolitan once thundered at a prima donna, "Stars on earth I do not know. I know only those that I see in the heavens."<sup>4</sup>

All these men followed the credo that, since in Wagner's "Gesamtkunstwerk" (work of the united arts) directions for all the elements of production—the musical ones: voice and orchestra; and the scenic ones: action, scenery, costumes, make-up, and lighting—are given in the orchestral score, this score becomes the supreme law in guiding its reproduction. Only by careful study and execution of the original score can the directors apply the production elements correctly and thereby transfer to the stage the authentic opera as its creator conceived it.

Toscanini has become recognized in America as the classic exponent and teacher of this moral and technical approach to musical interpretation. He considers the conductor, not an arbitrary, romantic "creator," but the faithful reproducer of the composer's directions as laid down in the score. Those who have witnessed the results Toscanini has achieved by following this principle will never forget it, although hardly anyone will ever be able to match the perfection of his interpretation. Similarly, those who have seen other great conductors like Bruno Walter at work in opera will not forget the lesson that there is no greater reward for the operatic interpreter than finding and reproducing the truth of the original.

This is as true for the stage director, choreographer, and chorus and ballet masters as for the conductor and the singers.

At first the conductor alone was responsible for the entire direction of the production. It was Richard Wagner who first requested that a "scenic director" be added to the "musical director," saying that "great care, which so far has been entirely lacking, ought to be given to the engagement of a regisseur or scenic director."<sup>5</sup> He himself was the stage director of the first productions of the *Ring* (1876) and *Parsifal* (1882) in his own Festival Theatre in Bayreuth, while Hans Richter and Hermann Levi, respectively, were the conductors.

This division into musical and stage direction, dictated by the extensive technical work of both arts, became the rule thereafter, but only the closest collaboration between the two, based on the score as their common ground, can assure a unified performance.

The manager consults the conductor and the stage director in selecting the cast. For today, in addition to the fundamental qualification

## REHEARSAL TO CURTAIN

of a good voice, physical appearance and acting ability are becoming of increasing importance. The new American audience is no longer lenient enough to accept an elderly Manon on her assurance that she is "but 16," or a corpulent Florestan who is soon to be a victim of starvation—although exceptions in the case of extraordinary voices must still be made.

After the cast and its understudies have been decided upon, a rehearsal plan is worked out by the conductor and the stage director, usually with the musical secretary of the organization. And here we meet our first stumbling block. Rehearsals, plenty of them, are essential to a good performance, but in trying to provide them American grand opera companies suffer from a grotesque dilemma.

On the one hand, American audiences in general, not understanding the words, get their pleasure from vocal virtuosity and so demand "stars" in the cast. On the other hand, the managers do not have sufficient financial means at their disposal to keep outstanding singers under season contracts. In most cases "name" singers are engaged for only a specified number of individual performances, and their contracts usually do not include provisions for rehearsals.\*

If these singers attend any number of rehearsals, it is only because of their own interest in giving a good performance. More often they arrive between closely booked concert dates for one or two rehearsals, do not sing with full voice, go in a casual manner through the routine of the *mise en scène*, without even taking the trouble to put on their costumes—all in the name of "saving" their voices for their strenuous schedule. And after the performance they disappear as swiftly as they arrived on their meteor-like way. Nor has the airplane improved their availability for opera rehearsals; it has only increased the number of their radio or concert bookings.

Actually, this situation is not always the fault of the singers, since their contracts do not provide them with any long-term guarantees. Professional expenses are very high and the earning period in a singer's life is short (and the pressure on the concert manager's part correspondingly strong). Nor can the opera managers be blamed if their public demands celebrities and they are in no position to offer such high-priced artists long-term contracts at fees they would accept.

\*It should be noted that Rudolf Bing has insisted on longer contracts, including availability for rehearsals, and he did not hesitate, even in his first season as manager, to dismiss a popular artist for breaking his contract.



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

The results of this situation are a chronic lack of complete rehearsals, constantly changing casts (usually only the cast of the first performance has had any stage rehearsals at all), and consequently a deplorable lack of musical and dramatic ensemble. It also means sticking to the old routine staging in which the experienced singer is well versed, so that he can go through the performance without stumbling even if he has not rehearsed it.

Under these conditions it is not surprising that most leading conductors have abandoned opera and prefer to work with the excellent American symphony orchestras which afford them both sufficient rehearsals and higher fees.

Toscanini has not conducted opera on the American stage since he left the Metropolitan in 1915. It is to the everlasting loss of opera in America that his unique mastership in this musical art has been used only in a number of radio concert performances, because he could have established model standards of operatic production for future generations. I can attest to two subsequent attempts the Maestro made to produce opera in this country, one for the New York World's Fair of 1939, the other for productions of *Falstaff* and *Traviata* in a Broadway theater. Both projects failed to materialize because the necessary financial guarantees were not provided.

It is likewise deplorable that Bruno Walter, after notable achievements as guest conductor at the Metropolitan between 1940 and 1945, resigned for artistic reasons and did not return until March 1951, and then only for a single production, *Fidelio*.

Stokowski and Szell shunned opera for some time; Rodzinski tried it in Chicago again and failed financially; Klemperer never attempted it here; Fritz Reiner returned to opera only after an absence of fourteen years; Fritz Busch has strictly limited his activities in this field; and Mitropoulos has given only concert performances of *Butterfly*, *Tosca*, *Elektra*, and *Wozzeck* (strangely enough, all realistic operas that seem to cry for the stage). Younger operatic conductors such as Steinberg, Leinsdorf, Smallens, and Abravanel have for the greater part deserted opera for concert positions. But a courageous few—Jan Popper, Wolfgang Martin, Karl Kritz—have undertaken to build up opera on a new basis in community centers, mostly in connection with university workshops.

## REHEARSAL TO CURTAIN

The conductor begins preparing the musical elements of an operatic production by studying the score, both words and music. Then he coaches the singers himself at the piano, making sure not only of the right tempos, but also of the detailed interpretation through voice and diction. From these sessions the assistant conductors learn the conductor's intentions and so are able to take over the additional rehearsals. The conductor also gives his instructions to the chorus master, indicates to the choreographer the tempos of the ballet music, and prepares the orchestra in separate rehearsals devoted to this purpose.

Musical preparation of the singers by great conductors is founded in the intimacy of the piano rehearsals. But here arises another problem besides the lack of time. It might be called the "high-note psychosis." Because opera is performed in a foreign language and is heard by millions only through the means of radio, the interest of the American public is focused on virtuoso singing, and particularly, it seems, on the reaching of high notes. Singers are often judged merely according to their ability to produce these vocal effects regardless of any dramatic reason for them.

I remember Lotte Lehmann's giving up the part of Elisabeth in *Tannhäuser* only because she did not feel comfortable singing the B natural at the end of the "Hallen" aria. When I objected, pointing out that she could sing G instead, since Wagner himself indicated the choice of either note in his score, she declared that the omission of the high note was constantly criticized. So Lehmann decided to sing no more a part that had been one of her most beautiful interpretations.

In *Rigoletto* a soprano is rarely accepted as really first class if she does not sing a high E natural at the end of the aria "Caro nome," although this note in the original score is an octave lower. Verdi's notation is the only logical one, since he used a lyric-dramatic voice for the characterization of the part, and that kind of voice would hardly be able to reach the acrobatic altitudes. Toscanini employed a lyric-dramatic soprano in his New York concert performance of Act IV, but the role of Gilda is usually given to a coloratura singer, thus sacrificing, for the sake of the one high note, all the other musical and dramatic demands of the part for the rest of the evening.

At the end of *Siegfried* Wagner gave Brünnhilde a choice for her

## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

last note, but again, any Brünnhilde taking the lower note is promptly marked down for deficiency.

This purely artificial approach creates an unhealthy overemphasis on virtuoso effects and destroys the proper balance between the dramatic meaning and the music. The singer, already hampered by uncommunicative singing in a foreign language, distrusts his ability to rely on proper expression of the word as the basis for the musical interpretation.

In the instructions which Wagner wrote for the directors and actors in *Tannhäuser* he requested *Leseprobe* (reading rehearsals), saying, "I have, therefore, to insist on a meeting of the entire cast, under the direction of the stage director and in the presence of the conductor, in which the drama is to be read aloud by the individual actors from their parts in the manner that is usual in the legitimate theatre; the chorus personnel might also be present at this reading, and the parts of the chorus are to be recited by the chorus director himself or a chorus leader. . . . The singer who is not able to first recite his part as a dramatic role, corresponding to the intention of the poet, will certainly also not be able to sing it according to the intention of the musician, not to speak at all of interpreting the character."

On the day when Wagner, after years of preparation, opened his Festival Theatre in Bayreuth, he addressed the artists on a poster which formulates in a few words the essence of his "last request" regarding their performance. This document is reproduced on the next page. The German text reads in translation as follows:

### *Last Request*

to my dear colleagues:

*!Distinctness!*

—The long notes take care of themselves; the small notes and their text are what matters.—

---

Never tell anything to the public, but always to your partners; in monologues look down or up, never straight out.—

*Last wish:*

*Remain good to me, you dear ones!*

Bayreuth, 13 August 1876

Richard Wagner

## REHEARSAL TO CURTAIN

Letzter Bitte  
an meine lieben Genossen.

! Seidlichkeit!

(Die grossen Noten kommen von selbst;  
die kleinen Noten und der Text sind die  
Blaupapere. —

Nicht dem Publikum etwas sagen, sondern  
immer den Anderen; in Selbstgesprächen  
nach unten oder nach oben blickend, wie  
gesed' aus. —

Letzter Wunsch:  
Bleibt mir gut, Ihr Lieben!

Bayreuth, 13 August 1876.

Richard Wagner

Wagner's final admonition to the artists before the first performance in the Festspielhaus at Bayreuth.

Richard Strauss, too, placed great emphasis on clear diction. In his foreword to *Intermezzo* (1924) he wrote, "No praise pleases me more than if this recognition is accorded to me when conducting my *Elektra*: 'Tonight I understood every single word.' If this is not the case, the conclusion can be drawn with certainty that the orchestral score has not been performed in the manner which I exactly indicated."

And he insisted, "Not even the most brilliant uproarious performance of the orchestral part by many of our today's concert conductors, who also unfortunately conduct opera, can silence the justified complaints about such musical treats at the expense of the comprehension of the action and the word of the poet. I have always, with growing success from work to work, devoted the greatest attention to significant declamation and tempo of the conversation."



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

Strauss added technical instructions to the singers about the importance of the consonants for clear enunciation:

"The singer, in particular, should be reminded of the fact that only the correctly formed consonant ever penetrates even the most brutal orchestra, while the strongest vocal tone, even at the best vowel *a*, will easily be drowned out by a sound apparatus of 80 to 100 instruments even if it plays only mezzoforte. For the singer there is only one weapon of defense against a polyphonic and indiscreet orchestra; the consonant. I myself have experienced, particularly in Wagner's tone dramas, for instance in Wotan's narration and in the Erda-scene of 'Siegfried,' that singers with big voices and bad enunciation were drowned powerlessly in the waves of the orchestra, while artists with smaller voices and pronounced enunciation of consonants, phrasing intelligently, could without effort maintain the position of the word of the poet against the flood-tide of the orchestral symphony."

Toscanini once said to me that if he were asked, after the experience of his long life in music, what seemed to him the most important element in operatic interpretation, he would unhesitatingly answer: "Diction." And he added that Verdi had said to him that he could make the aria of Father Germont in *Traviata*, which many consider noteworthy primarily for its melodic values, an experience merely by enunciation.

Those who have observed great conductors at piano rehearsals know that they achieve outstanding characterizations with singers not merely by vocal treatment, but by suitable interpretation of the word and its expression by the music. I shall never forget how, at a Salzburg performance in 1936, Toscanini's sharp enunciation of every *r* in "New-Junkerunkraut" gave the excellent Beckmesser of Hermann Wiedemann added venom in its expression of jealousy of Walther Stolzing. But the principle applies not only to such character parts as Beckmesser, or Falstaff, or Iago, but also to lyric roles like those of Desdemona and Mimi.

Bruno Walter works out the musical interpretation with the singer at the piano note by note, measure by measure, phrase by phrase. By this method he gave to a Metropolitan production of *Fidelio* in English an extraordinary emotional impact without any star singers at all.

Artists instructed by the conductor in this way, not merely from a vocal and musical point of view, but with regard to the musical-dramatic interpretation, are at the same time prepared for good acting.

## REHEARSAL TO CURTAIN

Word, music, and gesture become one. Those who have heard Lotte Lehmann's Marschallin in *Rosenkavalier* realize that only belief in the dramatic truth as manifested by the word, which gives beautiful music its inner meaning, makes opera a memorable experience.

"Beate sono le belle arti che non hanno bisogno di un interprete" (Fortunate are the fine arts which do not require an interpreter), Toscanini once sighed at a rehearsal. The task of transforming the countless nuances of an operatic score into a physical reality on the stage is indeed a difficult one, which takes expert knowledge, enthusiasm, and—rehearsals. For no opera can be produced well without sufficient time given to the preparation of singers and orchestra, even if only for the sake of securing merely accurate knowledge of the notes.

However, we do not want to lose sight of the fact that this technical mastery is only the means to the end, not the end itself.

I received a striking lesson on this point when Richard Strauss came to Basel in Switzerland in 1934, on the occasion of his seventieth birthday, to conduct a performance of his opera *Arabella* which we had prepared. Strauss came to an orchestra rehearsal and we were, of course, eager to learn how he liked our performance. Our conductor, who had coached the opera musically with his usual technical expertness and precision, asked the composer when he came backstage at the end of the rehearsal, "How do you like it, Meister? Isn't the opera well prepared? Very exact?"

"Yes, it's exact, very exact," Strauss said. Then, leaning over to him and confidentially putting his arm around his shoulders, he added, "But tell me, my friend, why do you want it to be so exact?"

Obviously, the composer felt our performance had missed the full realization of his intentions, which lay beyond the mere technical execution of his notes.

In America this final purpose of operatic interpretation—the artistic reproduction of the original musical-dramatic idea—is already handicapped by the language problem, and the lack of rehearsals adds to the difficulties. And since proper preparation of the musical part of the operatic production has to come first, naturally, little rehearsal time is left for attending to the action, scenery, costumes, make-up, and lighting. So staging becomes the stepchild of grand opera production in America.

## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

But then, operatic staging is still a young art. As we have said, only since the time of Wagner has the coordinate importance of the scenic elements in opera production been recognized.

Adolphe Appia, in his book *La musique et la mise-en-scène*,<sup>6</sup> has formulated the theory of the relationship between the scenic elements in opera and the music and defined the "hierarchy," the canonical order of their interrelation: The music determines the character and timing not only of the action, but also of the scenery, costumes, and lighting. Therefore, these elements in opera cannot be applied in free interpretation of the words, as in a play, but must serve as direct means of expressing the music. While in the legitimate drama "the text itself possesses no fixed, definite timing and that time which is not filled by the words, namely the pauses, are still less measurable," in opera we must transfer the precise timing of music, along with its inner emotional life, into corresponding visual images.

According to the degree of musical-dramatic emotion, the musical forms range in shade from the realistic *secco* recitative to purely contemplative solo arias (for instance, Don Ottavio's "Dalla sua pace" in *Don Giovanni*) or ensembles in which several characters express their feelings simultaneously (for instance, the finale of Act III in *Otello*).

Corresponding with this scale, the timing of the music varies from a nearly realistic duration in the recitative, which comes closest to the spoken drama, to a slowing down and even complete standstill, in which the action stops while sentiments are musically expanded in a very unreal manner. Words which when spoken last only a few seconds may in such musical expression take several minutes. And word repeats, as well as musical preludes, interludes, and postludes, add further un-realistic elements.

Think of the aria "Di quella pira" at the end of the third act of *Il Trovatore* and its important position within the structure of this opera. Manrico has just been informed by his faithful henchman Ruiz that the hated enemy has dragged his mother to the pyre, where she is about to be burned. He verifies the horrible news by a glance through the window, then commands Ruiz to "fly" for his men in order to save her. At this urgent moment Manrico stops to dwell at length in an aria on his feelings about his mother and his decision to save her—obviously without any doubts about losing valuable time.

Such situations, senseless according to any logic in spoken drama,

## REHEARSAL TO CURTAIN

not only are frequent in opera, but often represent, musically speaking, the high spot of the entire work. The quintet in *Die Meistersinger*, the trio and duet in the final scene of *Rosenkavalier*, the quartet in the first act and the last finale of Beethoven's *Fidelio*, all might serve as further examples of musical climaxes in the form of complete dramatic standstills in which the outward action stops and music takes over.

Operatic acting, then, must range from fairly realistic interpretation to unrealistic outward inactivity. This, however, is not to be considered and interpreted as "concert," but rather as a dramatically motivated scenic form corresponding and belonging only to the particular musical laws of opera.

Stage directors who are unfamiliar with these laws try to motivate such standstills by introducing new "business" of some sort, by acting out musical interludes (including overtures), and by added changes of scenery. Translators join them by replacing word repeats with continuous sentences. And all this is done in their eagerness to get realistic "sense" into this obviously senseless form.

With what result? The dramatic interpretation does not become convincing, because the music, written with a different purpose, does not support it; and the music is ruined because it is denied its undisturbed expansion.

I have to confess that in my earlier years I belonged to this category of "modern" stage directors who confuse the functions of dramatic and operatic stage direction. I was very proud, for instance, of my "original" idea of constantly changing groups around in order to enliven the static finale of Act II in *Tannhäuser*, in which three groups—Tannhäuser in despair, Elisabeth pleading for his life, and the knights condemning him—express their contrasting sentiments simultaneously. It took me some time to realize that I could not improve upon Wagner.

With masterful insight into the particular task of operatic production, Bruno Walter in an as yet unpublished book deals with this basic problem.<sup>7</sup> He cites as a classic example of such "dwelling places" of music the ensemble in Act II of *Lohengrin*, "Welch ein Geheimnis" (What a mystery), which is usually cut in American performances. Pointing out that here all the participants are expressing their sentiments about Elsa's wavering faith, he writes:



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

"The prima donna with her hand on her heart was almost right—if not in method, at least in principle: An opera production comprehensive of the spirit of music often will avail itself of a stillness of action which the spoken drama does not know. So when music dwells on that one dramatic moment in *Lohengrin*, I am sure the producer will have satisfied the theatrical demands of the scene if everybody on stage remains in that feeling, expressing it by facial expression and general attitude as long as the ensemble lasts.

"The maintenance of that dramatic mood will definitely distinguish the stage from a concert platform. In no other way can the producer adjust the stage proceedings to the timelessness of music than by responding tranquillity in the behavior of the actors, without ever allowing oblivion of the dramatic situation, always keeping mood and expression all the more drama-conscious the less action can be permitted to interfere with the eloquence of the music. He must not be afraid that such 'thinning' of action on stage may cause a relaxation of the tension, because the musical intensity is increasing in the same measure as the theatrical 'density' decreases."

The "how" and "when" of operatic gesture are dependent on the music in various ways which can be grouped in three categories:

1. The music can be merely suggestive as to the general mood and timing of the gesture. This is mostly the case in the operas of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, whose musical forms deal with general emotions rather than psychological details. The mourning of Orpheus or the three moods of hatred, hope, and decision in Leonore's aria in *Fidelio* also fall into this category, in which the acting is comparatively free.

2. Wagner, endeavoring to secure the coordination of all the production elements, systematically bound certain movements, gestures, and even looks to corresponding musical phrases and accents, thereby employing illustrative or pantomimic music. The first and second scenes of Act I in *Die Walküre* are full of stage directions tying the action to specific music so as to permit no leeway in the scenic interpretation. The same method is applied to its extreme, in this case for comic purposes, in Beckmesser's pantomime in the first part of the third act of *Die Meistersinger*. This principle was later applied by conductors

## REHEARSAL TO CURTAIN

to the interpretation of works of other composers and often resulted in the so-called "Kapellmeister Regie" (conductor's stage direction), meaning the constant coincidence of musical accent and gesture.

Bruno Walter points out that such pantomimic precision, although required at times, is not the most important of all the possible ways of relating stage action and music, and should be handled with discretion. "An opera performance may even be lacking in that respect and yet prove full of genuine musicality; whereas a performance where all opportunities for precise coincidence of music and gesture are taken care of, might be—in a deeper sense of the word—unmusical. For the illustration of gestures and movements is only secondary, incidental, and sometimes even a low function of music in opera."

3. The third form, music that defines the action without putting it in slavish chains, could be called "scenically expressive" music. Mozart's *Figaro* and Verdi's *Otello* and *Falstaff* might serve as the most noble models of this type. In them operatic action becomes unostentatious higher reality if it just follows the words, the musical phrases, the meaning of orchestral interludes, and the grouping of voices in the score.

To the process of deriving operatic gesture and scenic interpretation from the musical notation of the score Ernst Lert, in his book *Mozart auf dem Theater*<sup>8</sup> (Mozart on the Theater), has applied the term "gestische Hermeneutik" (hermeneutics of the gesture).

Obviously, this process could not be carried out by a producer who relied only on the words of the libretto. "What else could he produce," Bruno Walter asks, "but a helpless performance where the neglected music and his arrangements disturbed each other? How to act during the orchestral preludes, interludes, postludes which he could not find in his libretto? How to arrange a scene according to the text if the music gave it a peculiar meaning of which the libretto could not contain an indication? How to fill a music-piece of three minutes' duration, the words of which he could speak in some seconds?"

I remember a colleague who, although he was a fine dramatic director, was helpless when directing opera because of his lack of musical knowledge. Once at a rehearsal of the wedding procession in the second act of *Lohengrin*, he as usual did not know what to do with the timing when the various groups of which he had made up the cortege had

## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

not arrived on stage at the moment when the processional is ended by Ortrud's abrupt interference. So he asked the conductor whether he could not insert a roll of drums to provide some extra time!

Opera producers often try to find a solution by some such arbitrary idea. "But [I am again quoting Bruno Walter] no matter how gifted, how 'interesting' the staging of such performances may be, music does not tolerate being misinterpreted or ignored. Its powerful language gives the lie to all misinterpretations, talented as they may be; the most striking, the most 'original' inventions of the producer become ineffective when they deviate from the musical expression, and—consciously or unconsciously—the spectator feels confused and dissatisfied by the discord between stage and music."

Today we have learned that the operatic stage director, like the conductor, is not a creator but an interpreter, and that his tools are not mystic ideas, but a factual technique based on the knowledge of the authors' work, enhanced by his talent of communicative reproduction. The operatic director interprets the scenic elements in the spirit of the music as the conductor interprets the musical elements in the spirit of the drama. Standing firmly on the solid earth of the score, in close collaboration with the conductor, the scenic designer, and the choreographer, he prepares the scenic production.

The first step in planning the staging, then, is a thorough analysis of the work itself. The words and the music must be carefully studied until the director feels completely at home with them. Sometimes, particularly in older works, reference to the original editions of the score and libretto will provide added information.

For instance, in planning a new production of *Figaro* at the Metropolitan in 1940, I found valuable help in the libretto which was used originally by the stage manager in preparing the first performance of the opera in Vienna under Mozart's own supervision; this is now in possession of the Library of Congress in Washington. It contains more stage directions than were later printed in the score.

If there are letters or other personal comments by the authors, as is the case with the works of Richard Wagner, Verdi, and Richard Strauss, their every suggestion ought to be read. Wagner's essay "About the Performance of *Tannhäuser*," for example, is of great value to the producer of this opera, and his first rough sketches for *Die*

## REHEARSAL TO CURTAIN

*Meistersinger* help us to get a deeper understanding of his final scenic concept. Sometimes there exist reliable comments by collaborators or eyewitnesses which deserve examination.

Next one undertakes research into the historical background of the opera and the particular customs of its period. The preparation of scenery and costumes for the 1936 *Meistersinger* production in Salzburg took ten months. I went to Nürnberg to study the historical places, fashions, and customs that enter into the opera's story. There I found some very beautiful costume designs made in that day by the German painter Albrecht Dürer. I also studied the chronicles of the *Meistersinger* guilds, which were Wagner's basis for the rules of the *Meistersinger*. From them I learned the reasons for various details of their meeting in the first act, and also got some helpful suggestions for the characterization and make-up of the different masters.

It was similar research when we staged Verdi's *Masked Ball* at the Metropolitan that led to our restoring the original Swedish locale and period, which Verdi, because of censorship, was forced to transfer to Boston. This alteration had made the conspiracy of "Sam" and "Tom" a pretty ridiculous distortion of the original event, in which at the time of the French Revolution a conservative aristocracy murdered a liberal king during a ball at the opera house.

In the same way, when, with the painter Eugene Berman, we were preparing a new production of *Rigoletto* at the Metropolitan in 1951, we carefully studied Victor Hugo's drama *Le Roi s'amuse*. This had been the basis for Verdi's original composition, but he later, despite violent protests, was forced by the censorship to change many of its characteristic details.

But study of the historical background can be misleading if one does not keep the opera itself constantly in mind. Sometimes the operatic libretto and music are at great variance with the original drama from which the libretto was derived. For instance, in the *Elektra* of Hofmannsthal and Richard Strauss the characters are very different from those in the drama by Sophocles. The Hofmannsthal-Strauss version, influenced by the new psychoanalysis of Freud, makes them more neurotic, and the music likewise. Following the ancient background alone would not be sufficient; scenery and acting in the opera must assimilate and express both versions.

Again, the producer and designer who followed only the style of



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

Oscar Wilde's *Salome* or its ascetic illustrations by Aubrey Beardsley would be far off the right style for the opera by Richard Strauss, because its music is full of colorful, symphonic opulence. And Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro* is very different from Beaumarchais' comedy, even though Da Ponte used a good deal of the latter for his libretto. The brilliant but brittle sophistication of the French revolutionary writer has given way to Mozart's spirit, which softened the bitterness with love and Austrian ease.

The musical form will suggest the form of the scenery—the horizontal and vertical formation of its space as well as its pictorial style. Operatic scenery does not follow the same treatment as scenery in the spoken drama for the same reason that action cannot: It has to provide swinging room for the music and sufficient physical space for accommodating great numbers and movements of chorus and ballet, often on contrasting levels.

A look at great European scenic design, from Galli-Bibbiena to Nicola Benois, will show how the fundamental concept of operatic scenery is dictated by the expansiveness of musical emotion. But American designers, called upon at times to design settings for opera, seldom belie their descent from the legitimate stage. Their grand opera scenery often lacks the space, line, and color needed to correspond to the music. Operatic scenery must be "musical" in the deepest sense.

Take the second finale of *Fidelio*. Not only must the scenery provide the space for six soloists, sixty to ninety choristers, supers, and sometimes "figurants" taken from the ballet, but it must permit their being placed in contrasting groups—prisoners, people, soldiers of the minister, and so on—in a way that fits the musical style of the opera. For *Fidelio* is not just telling a realistic story about a prisoner, Florestan, who is liberated by his wife Leonore from a particular Spanish prison at a particular time; it is dramatizing the universal theme of liberation from dictatorship by the power of conjugal love, and this theme is expressed by the great, oratorio-like, idealized style of Beethoven's music. Only scenery which catches the spirit of this musical concept will truly fit the hymnic breadth of Beethoven's opera.

There are other technical points to be considered. First, the size and character of the theater in which the opera is to be given. A production of *Figaro* staged at the historical and intimate Teatro della Pergola (built in 1755 and holding 1600 seats) in Florence would

## REHEARSAL TO CURTAIN

necessarily be very different from one staged in the Metropolitan's auditorium holding 3417. In the Florence production the scenery might try to recapture the "feel" of the original period of the theater by using painted wings and backdrops in the perspective style of the eighteenth century, while for the Metropolitan the production would have to be blown up to bigger dimensions and also brought closer to the audience.

The *Fidelio* sets that Donald Oenslager designed for the small 700-seat theater of the opera house in Central City, Colorado, had to be treated in a symbolic, simple manner, while a new production of the same work at the San Francisco opera house was designed by Harry Horner in a more theatrical style.

The daily schedule of performances and rehearsals is another practical consideration. There may be a *Tristan* matinee ending at 6 P.M., while at 8 P.M. the curtain has to go up on the evening performance of *Carmen*. Such changes, commonplace for grand opera companies, necessitate constant setting up, striking, and transporting of the scenery, and consequently impose technical limitations on its design and construction. Other simplifications of the scenery are dictated by the difficulties of touring and playing on smaller and modestly equipped stages.

Sometimes, of course, necessity gives birth to invention and interesting solutions arise from technical restrictions. For instance, in Salzburg, where the stage in 1936 was very shallow but high, we fitted the setting to the stage in the second act of *Die Meistersinger* by having a street leading upward, and this not only proved to be a pictorially good effect, but, practically enough, gave the chorus a good opportunity to see the conductor's beat.

Finally, the stage director and scenic designer must take into account the character of the audience, the fact that we play for a modern audience which has its own clearly conceived ideas of beauty and simplicity. Occasional attempts to imitate the scenery used in Mozart's and Wagner's first productions have never been convincing because the taste of the public has changed. In Bayreuth itself the sumptuous style of Wagner's first productions has continuously been simplified in line with modern concepts, and in general the tradition of European operatic production has been renewed organically with the times (see Plates 38-40). The opera producer, besides being an interpreter of the author's intentions, is also a mediator between the author and the audience.

## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

Costuming and make-up, too, must be planned carefully in accordance with the demands of the work, the style of the production, and modern taste. Costumes of Wagner's time look more than strange to us today, and Lohengrin with a beard would not so readily win the interest of modern women as in Wagner's time when a beard was the symbol of manhood.

Study of the historical style as well as the dramatic and musical significance of the part will suggest the proper design and color. We cannot imagine Ortrud dressed in white or Lohengrin in black, but we can approve the relationships in some such basic color scheme as this: Elsa, white; Lohengrin, celestial blue and silver; the king, old gold; the herald, metallic yellow; Telramund, brown and metal; and Ortrud, dark red and gray.

The suitability of design and color for the individual singer must also be considered. A corpulent prima donna should not be dressed in white, for instance.

But it is most important that uniformity of style and coordination of color be established. Yet this basic factor is sadly neglected in the costuming of our major opera companies. Usually the leading singers bring their own costumes, and there is no telling what incongruous combinations this practice may produce.

Once in a performance of *Tannhäuser* the soprano singing the part of Elisabeth surprised me by arriving on stage, just before the beginning of the second act, dressed in a new costume covered by a brand new lobster-red cape. In previous performances she had worn the traditional blue-and-white costume and I was not expecting any change. But being accustomed to furnishing her own costumes, she had decided it was time for a new one and was quite pleased with this version "created" for her by a well-known Hollywood designer, even though the usual colors seemed better suited to the character of the chaste Elisabeth.

When *Tannhäuser*—Lauritz Melchior—entered from the other side of the stage also draped in a big lobster-red cape, the expected contrast of Elisabeth's costume disappeared, and she was the first to regret the unintentional lack of coordination of colors.

Actually, the singers can hardly be blamed for this situation, since the opera companies—in America, not in Europe—expect the leading singers to supply their own costumes; those for the chorus and

## REHEARSAL TO CURTAIN

ballet, of course, are provided by the management. Seldom do the companies plan a new coordinated set of costumes and provide them for the entire cast. Here is another result of the chronic lack of money. So, when something untoward happens, like the lobster-red Elisabeth, the stage director can only be heartbroken, take the blame, threaten to resign—and then, for better reasons, stay on.

Proper make-up goes hand in hand with good costuming. In the American legitimate theater and motion picture of today "type-casting" has to a great extent replaced the practice of self-disguise which was once one of the actor's strongest motivating forces. The revealing power of the electric spotlight has made make-up technically more difficult. In opera, where casting is not according to "type" but to voice, most singers are often satisfied with merely putting some rouge on their cheeks or a beard around their face. Only a handful of artists understand the art of individual make-up and its importance for significant characterization.

But the stage director who wants more in the way of make-up than the individual artist knows how to achieve is usually up against restrictions of custom and contract. The make-up man is often under contract only to take care of the chorus and ballet. So, naturally, he will furnish wigs or do make-up for the leading singers only at an additional fee which they must pay. And if they can see nothing wrong with their own results or are unwilling to pay the fee for a better job of it, the stage director can do nothing but wish for a make-up department fully responsible for such matters in the entire cast.

The stage director also, as a part of his preparatory study, makes a list of the needed properties, ranging from "hand props" such as letters and swords to furniture and such specialties as Siegfried's "dragon." With the properties needed for operas like *Die Meistersinger* or *Der Rosenkavalier*, an interior decorator could equip a small house.

Next comes the preparation of the layout for the lighting. Again it was Wagner who first systematically coordinated scenic and lighting changes with the music and laid them down precisely in the score—not only special effects such as the beam of light that falls upon the Holy Grail at a certain measure in *Parsifal*, but also extended effects, such as the magic fire in *Die Walküre*.

Adolphe Appia in his *La Musique et la mise-en-scène* was the first to establish the theory of the dependence of the lighting on the music



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

and its function as an element of the scenic production. To paraphrase his words: The light is to the performance what the music is to the printed score; as music is the expression of the idea indicated by the symbolic sign of the notes, so light is the expression suggested by the action and the setting. "The light, like the music, can express only what belongs to the 'inner being of every outward form'."

Appia's interpretation of the function of scenery and lights as means of musical expression, which he outlined in words as well as in designs for *Tristan and Isolde* and the *Ring* as early as 1899, has greatly influenced the work of modern operatic designers. He distinguishes between general "brightness," on which the old lighting system relied, and "formative light," which creates accentuating highlights and shadows. In his analysis of *Tristan*, he sketches the lighting of Act III according to the score as follows:

"On p. 215 the growing light begins to play around Tristan's feet. On p. 218 it reaches his belt, on p. 221 it grazes his face, on p. 223 he is entirely immersed in light; p. 225 the light spills over his immediate surroundings. On p. 223-236 the light is at its high point. Nevertheless the stage is never brightly lighted, for the wall which cuts off the sky in the background continues to throw deep shadows in the castle yard and also on the path leading up to it. Beginning on p. 236 the light is the color of the sunset. But this rapidly dims during the singing of p. 238-242; the animated scene (p. 245-248) plays in relative darkness, so that details are no longer recognizable; in contrast the foreground is bathed in blood red light which continues to grow in intensity.

"The stage platforms which form the base of the wall can be advantageously used for the combat (p. 248-249). Kurwenal comes into the light as he is wounded and collapses near Tristan. None of Mark's men-at-arms nor any of Kurwenal's leave the area of shadow. The greatest care must be taken in regard to the cast shadows in this last scene, so that Mark and Brangaene, who have their backs to the source of light, become dark silhouettes without, however, casting a shadow on Tristan or Isolde. Kurwenal falls in the shadow cast by Tristan. From p. 254 on the light dims more and more until the forms of the stage setting remain in constantly darker twilight. The curtain falls on a quiet, harmonious picture, in which the eye distinguishes

## REHEARSAL TO CURTAIN

nothing but the last traces of sunset which play softly around Isolde's white figure."<sup>9</sup>

Today the art of lighting has become a factor of great importance in making the operatic stage a medium for communicating the "inner being" of the music. Hundreds of technical devices have been developed to supplement the former general lighting—spotlights, projections, and other means, all using varied colors and intensities to give the picture its individual values.

The stage director should be thoroughly familiar with the uses and possibilities of all these means for lighting, so that in his plans he can fuse lighting effects with set and costume to create a unified scenic expression of the music's shifting emotional moods.

The director is now ready for the vital task of planning the action of the principals, chorus, and ballet. Here, as we have pointed out, his task is twofold: to devise operatic action that gives visual form to the ideas of drama and music, and to keep singers, chorus, and ballet in proportion as coordinated parts of the musical drama.

Such coordination is sometimes sadly lacking. Not long ago I saw a well-known tenor on an American stage step completely out of the dramatic picture: Hearing the ovation which rewarded a beautiful rendition of the famous duet "Solenne in quest' ora" in Verdi's *La Forza del Destino*, which the tenor sings while lying wounded on a stretcher, he arose from his bed of pain, forgetting his wounds, smilingly acknowledged the applause, then lay back on the stretcher to be carried off-stage—to the accompaniment of an outburst of laughter from the audience. Today's listeners, trained to dramatic credibility, expect the opera singer to be part of the play and to remain in character.

When Walther Stolzing first sings the "prize" song to Hans Sachs in *Die Meistersinger* (in the second scene of the first part of Act III), we read the following stage directions by Wagner in the score: "Walther has seated himself at the working table near Sachs, who writes down Walther's poem." But usually the tenor stands. Why? Probably because ringing tones are more easily achieved when standing up.

But this seemingly minor departure destroys the dramatic meaning of the scene. For here Master Hans Sachs, like a father, is guiding

## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

Walther, who is not yet able to bring his dream into reality, to give birth to his song. Here a gradual process begins in the intimacy of a conversational scene across Sachs' work table on a sunny holiday morning.

At the end of this scene Wagner indicates the moment when Walther "rises quickly." He has found the poetic form for his vision; the composition is created. After Eva enters the room he sings the song a second time, now in full possession of it. And in the following scene, the singing contest at the Festival meadow, he sings it for the third time as "Mastersinger" and wins the "prize"—Eva.

Therefore, the intimate interpretation of the first singing of Walther's song, as indicated in Wagner's directions, is essential to convey the dramatic significance of the scene, to show that Walther is in the process of composing his song. If he sings it at this point while standing up, as he does intentionally later, it becomes a tenor's aria which he already knew well by memory.

Stage directions in pre-Wagnerian operas are comparatively scarce and the meaning of words and music offer the only guidance to the staging, but Wagner and his successors have been quite explicit in their written requests. And yet quite frequently singers and producers presume to know better.

A well-known interpreter of *Rosenkavalier*, for instance, used to make Octavian's entrance with the silver rose in the second act in such a manner as to be looking straight at the audience when solemnly pronouncing her first words, "Mir ist die Ehre widerfahren" (On me the honor was bestowed). Only later did she look at Sophie, to whom she was to present the rose.

I objected. It was not right for several reasons: First, Hofmannsthal's directions read as follows: "Octavian, the rose in his right hand, advances toward Sophie with noble bearing, but his youthful face is tense and blushes with shyness. Sophie is pale as death with excitement at his appearance. They stand opposite each other and render one another still more confused by their embarrassment and beauty." And Strauss set Octavian's first words to the music in Example 6.

By reading the stage directions and observing the musical declamation, which is interrupted by several pauses, resembling stammering, we see that the authors want Octavian not only to perceive Sophie immediately, but also to become confused by her beauty and utter

## REHEARSAL TO CURTAIN

*etwas stockend*

Octavian: *Mir ist die Eh - - re wi - der - fah - ren, dass ich der*

*pp*

Example 6. From Richard Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier*,  
libretto by Hugo Hofmannsthal.

Reproduced by permission of the copyright owner, Boosey and Hawkes Ltd.

the words accordingly. They did not have in mind a merely showy, theatrical entrance, but one full of poetic significance for the play and its future development.

I must confess that I did not succeed in changing the singer's action. She insisted that she had "always" been successful with this entrance. She did make one concession though: While entering she gave one quick look at Sophie, but then turned toward the audience to deliver her message as previously.

In directing the movements of intricate ensembles, such as the "Ride of the Valkyries," words and music are the only reliable guides in finding the right action. The distribution and direction of the various groupings can best be achieved by following the constantly changing combinations of voices.

The problem becomes more difficult when action has to be "invented" to express purely orchestral passages. These may be preludes, preparing the dramatic mood (such as the introduction to the quartet in the first act of *Fidelio*), or postludes following a musical number (such as the one ending Don Ottavio's aria "Il mio tesoro"), or interludes that serve as connecting links. Rarely can such passages be successfully interpreted by applying ideas that come from the outside. Often the words that precede an interlude offer a clue to the right action.

For instance, in the chorus of the tailors in the last scene of *Die Meistersinger*, it is a German tradition to fill the interlude (Example 7) with comic jumps resembling bucks' leaps. When I was staging the opera in Salzburg, I had at first no intention of changing this routine



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

to which the chorus and I were accustomed, although I had always sensed somehow that this interpretation was forced. When Toscanini called my attention to the last phrase preceding this interlude—"Hat sich in ein Bocksfell eingenäht" (in a goatskin he himself has sewn)—I realized quickly that the music following the word "eingenäht" (sewn) clearly meant an amusing illustration of this sewing and I directed the action of the chorus accordingly. The result was that a detail of the action which before had been unconvincing suddenly appeared natural because of finding its organic meaning.



Example 7. From Wagner's *Die Meistersinger*.

But an interlude does not always mean movement. The interpretation of the prelude to Orpheus' aria "Che puro ciel," for instance, in which he expresses his feelings when entering the Elysian fields, or the introduction to the aria of the Countess at the beginning of the second act of *Figaro* will be a test of the director's ability to find an appropriately quiet form of dramatic action.

Directing the chorus as an integral part of the dramatic production is one of the producer's important tasks. Here, too, the scores by Wagner and his successors offer greater help to him than do earlier works, and the "Pruegel-Szene" (fight scene) at the end of the second act of *Die Meistersinger* is probably the most instructive example of how a chorus scene, clearly indicated by its author, can be reproduced from the score. Here each vocal group has its own scenic life. The five main groups—the "neighbors," "apprentices," "journeymen," "women neighbors," and "masters"—are each subdivided into the most varied individual parts.

If the director follows the realistic distribution of the voices of these groups in the score, including the lamenting women at the windows, he can hardly fail to carry out the right scenic reproduction. The scene

## REHEARSAL TO CURTAIN

is organically built up: First the neighbors, aroused from their sleep by Beckmesser's howling and Sachs' hammering, peer from the windows of their houses and call for silence. Then one by one they come down to the street in order to end the fight between David and Beckmesser, and they themselves finally get involved in the argument. The first box on the ear falls (much later than is usually the case) between Zorn and Vogelgesang and soon has consequences among the excited witnesses who are standing around watching. Taking sides in the fight, Kothner and Nachtigall get to arguing, then Moser and Eisslinger join in, followed by the apprentices, the journeymen, and the burghers.

Choral action may range in character from this kind of realism or that in *Carmen* to the sort of stylized action called for in Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex*. If the composer's stage directions do not tell the director what sort is wanted, he must answer the question for himself by studying each detail of the musical score.

Of similar importance is the coordination of the ballet with the rest of the performance, but it requires a close understanding between director and choreographer to make the opera ballet part of the drama without subduing its own artistry.

This is particularly difficult in older works, where on one hand ballet masters of the traditional school tend to use classic ballet techniques for the sake of toe-dance effects and poses, while on the other hand modern choreographers, for the sake of dramatic self-expression, disregard the style inherent in the musical forms. Even notable modern choreographers like Balanchine and Tudor, when staging dances at the Metropolitan, have failed to find the necessary compromise. The dances in Gluck's *Orfeo*, for instance, have to correspond to the musical form of the eighteenth-century gavotte, minuet, chaconne, and so forth, and at the same time convey the dramatic Greek idea of the opera.

I once worked on a production of *Tannhäuser* with a ballet master who, in his choreography for the Bacchanale, had almost completely disregarded Wagner's request that in this scene there was to be "no dance as is customary in our operas and ballets" but "a seductive, wild, and ravishing chaos of groupings and movements from softest ease, longing, and desire to the most exuberant rage of exalted abandon."<sup>10</sup> He crowned his ineptness by having most of his dancers still on stage

## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

at a time when Wagner's directions clearly indicated that the set was to be empty except for Venus and Tannhäuser. When I pointed this out to him in the score and asked him to correct his timing, he declined, explaining with an indulgent smile, "You know, Wagner did not understand much about ballet"!

New productions of old works require a choreographer who, while meeting the technical demands of the old forms, always has in mind the creed of the great Noverre: "The gesture originates from the passion which it is to represent; it is an arrow which the soul shoots off; it must suddenly achieve its effect and hit the target as it is sent off by the string of feeling."<sup>11</sup>

Having made himself thoroughly familiar with the scenic requirements of the opera and prepared his own ideas and plans for their realization, the producer is ready to meet with his collaborators: first, with the conductor for consultation on his preferences regarding the style of the production, cuts, number in the chorus, and other such matters; then with the ballet and chorus masters regarding their ideas as to choreographic interpretation, space, and numbers. According to the decisions reached, costume lists are made out specifying the needed number of soloists, chorus members, dancers, and supers and their individual tasks.

The stage director is now ready for his first conference with the designer of the scenery and costumes. He suggests the general style of the production, sketches the elevation requirements, and passes on his ideas for the costuming. Together they examine the physical possibilities of the stage and consult with the technical director. Special lighting effects are discussed with the master electrician. Sketches are made, changed, and remade by the scenic designer, and finally he works out small models of the scenes in scale.

Then comes the critical hour: presentation of the plans to the management. At this session many golden dreams are likely to be tossed aside for reasons of economy. Agreement as to what and how much can be done is eventually reached, and ground plans, working drawings, and color designs for scenery and properties, costumes, make-up, and lighting effects go into execution.

The stage director is now in a position to complete his detailed direction book, a score in which sheets of white paper are fixed between

## REHEARSAL TO CURTAIN

the pages of music. On these sheets all directions concerning space distribution, placing of properties, light cues and positions, numbers of groups, and details of the acting are marked to correspond to numbers placed on the measures of the musical page, thus ensuring the proper timing of the scenic execution.

While carpenter and paint shops, property and light departments, costumers and wigmakers are busy with their work, the musical rehearsals of singers, chorus, and orchestra and the preparation of the ballet take place in separate rehearsal rooms under the conductor, his assistants, and the chorus and ballet masters. Just as soon as the parts have been studied musically, the stage director begins his coaching of the artists, going over the action worked out for the individual roles, first in a large rehearsal room.

The cooperation between great singers and the stage director seems to me the most interesting part of our profession, one in which the requirements of the work itself, the idea of the production, and the individuality of the singer have to be woven together into one artistic unity.

I should like to say here that, contrary to common opinion, operatic singers are not of necessity fat and poor actors. It is true that singers have chosen their profession and are engaged for their parts in most cases primarily because of their vocal abilities, and consequently there are some specimens of "ham" singers strutting around our opera stages who definitely do not fit into their roles of young lovers or heroes. It is also true that, as Bruno Walter has said, "singing and acting easily interfere with each other and the old way of singing the musical numbers and acting the recitatives had some justification in physical conditions which the modern opera producer also cannot exclude from his considerations."

Opera composers and stage directors aren't consulted when voices and bodies are distributed, and Nature doesn't always cooperate!

But nevertheless there are today a great number of "streamlined" and talented singing actors on our opera stages, singers who also frequently appear in light opera, on Broadway, and in motion pictures. The Metropolitan Opera's production of *The Marriage of Figaro* had casts of singers like Pinza or Tajo, Singher, Brownlee, Baccaloni, De-Paolis, Steber, Sayao, Stevens, Novotna, and Petina, all of them very able actors. And we can think also of a great number of young Ameri-



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

can singers at the Metropolitan, at the New York City Center Opera, and in the other opera companies who have good looks and real acting ability as well as good voices.

Good acting by soloists and chorus members alike is made extremely difficult in America by the fact that they perform in languages which for the most part they do not understand. Although we take it for granted that the artists have studied the meaning of the words they are singing, this does not ensure their complete awareness of every detail of this meaning while in performance. And it is still more difficult, under these circumstances, to achieve natural and appropriate reactions to the words of one's partners. I take off my hat to the American singers who under these handicaps, and often without sufficient rehearsals, achieve convincing performances of roles in three foreign languages.

When the initial preparation of soloists, chorus, ballet, and orchestra in separate rehearsal rooms has been completed, we are ready to go on stage. Here at first the rehearsals are with piano accompaniment, until the combined action of all the participants has been established. The wooden structure of the scenery is set up—as yet merely the elevations without the painted masking pieces that will cover them later. This skeleton of the set marks out the exact acting areas. The stage director leads the rehearsal scenically, distributing and arranging the action. The conductor leads the rehearsal musically. The ballet master joins if the ballet is present, and the chorus master supervises the chorus. The piano stage rehearsals are followed by stage rehearsals with the orchestra.

Meanwhile the scenery has been completed and is set up and lighted in separate rehearsals. The scenic changes and their timing to the music are rehearsed with the help of assistant conductors. And the lights are arranged which are to give life to the picture and the actors.

The different moods, transitions, and special effects are carefully worked out with the electrician and certain light positions are established as numbered cues. These "light cues" are written down in the light plot of the electrician at the switchboard, and the corresponding numbers are given to the stage manager, who notes them down in his score. He also includes in this score the musical cues for the time and speed of raising and lowering the curtain, for open scenic changes, and for operating traps and machines to produce such effects as wind,

## REHEARSAL TO CURTAIN

steam, thunder, and lightning. From his central control board the stage manager gives all these cues by light signals or telephone orders to the men handling the equipment.

Finally, the lighted scenery, costumes, and make-up are added to the stage rehearsals with orchestra, and the skeleton impression of the first rehearsals takes on the shape of its final appearance. At the general rehearsal the picture of the performance is completed. The long, hard work of preparation has made the operatic production a reality, and all its many details fuse in a performance of organic naturalness. The better the production the less the audience will be aware of the thought, effort, and backstage technique that went into its making.

That is the process of operatic production from rehearsal to curtain. Or rather, that is what the process should be.

It is no secret that, while legitimate plays and musicals on Broadway and in the movies are planned and rehearsed with this kind of care, grand opera in America is scarcely ever produced this way. Lacking sufficient private or government support, American grand opera companies can only rarely afford the expense of restaging operas with full artistic means.

In Europe each of the forty or so repertoire operas appears in a new production about every eight years on the average (figuring that about five repertoire operas are restaged each season). But new productions in America are as a rule limited to so-called "revivals"—that is, to repeat performances in which the music and acting have been freshened up while scenery and costumes remain more or less as before. Complete new productions are made, as a rule, only if no old ones are available or if the old scenery is too worn out to be used. Lauritz Melchior's fall from a dilapidated table in the first act of *Die Walküre* was one of the contributing factors in providing the Met with new scenery for the *Ring* in 1948.

Practically all sets for the Metropolitan's "bread and butter" operas, such as *Bohème*, *Faust*, *Barber of Seville*, *Tannhäuser*, *Lohengrin*, are more than twenty-five years old, while the original costumes have been used as needed in other operas. Consequently, the scenic productions today's audience is seeing frequently correspond neither with the original design nor with the taste of our time.

Even when new productions are scheduled, they cannot be ade-

## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

quately prepared because there is not time enough. In order to achieve a changing repertoire, most of the season's operas are produced within the first few weeks. During the 1947-48 season the Metropolitan had performed twenty-two different operas between its opening on November 10 and the first performance of the new production of *Das Rheingold* on January 7. And only four or five mornings a week were available for stage rehearsals. Where was there time for rehearsing the new production? And then the première of the new *Die Walküre* followed on January 13, *Siegfried* on January 21, and *Die Götterdämmerung* on January 29!

Any Broadway producer would shudder at the mere thought of such a schedule. His operatic colleagues can only envy him—and make the best of their own impossible conditions.

# *Buildings for the* **OPERA**

**THE HISTORY** of opera parallels in time the tremendous social and technological revolution which has so drastically altered our ways of life. It has scrapped social privileges along with the horse-driven coaches and sent us traveling by railroad, automobile, and airplane; it has blown out our candles and turned on electric switches; it has broadened a vague idea of the globe as made up of unrelated, distant countries and continents into the modern concept of One World.

But of all these changes the opera building seems to have taken little notice. Whether in Milan, Naples, Vienna, Paris, London, or New York, the form of the luxurious courtly box theater has prevailed ever since the first public opera house was opened in Venice in 1637. This auditorium was originally devised by Italian architects more for the purpose of grouping the audience according to social rank in well-separated tiers and boxes arranged around the emperor's or duke's central box, than to feature the musical drama on the stage or to permit everyone an equally good view of it.

It was only logical, given this social function, that the courtly box theater kept the stage in splendid isolation from the audience by



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

means of a proscenium frame. Through this "peephole" the stage picture was presented as in a frame, similar to the Renaissance paintings and using their new technique of perspective. The only difference was that the two-dimensional picture was transformed into the three-dimensional stage form by cutting it into several fields by means of "wings" (forming the sides), "borders" (for the parts above), and "backdrops" (for the backgrounds).

These scenic parts were painted on canvas pieces hung on beams suspended by ropes from the machinery ("gridiron") above the stage; thus they could be pulled up and down for the necessary scenic changes. There were also "traps" and flying machines to produce miracle effects, for opera from its beginnings was given to such spectacular contrivances, there being no movies or music halls as yet.

Opera was richly supported by the European courts, which tried to outdo each other in lavish expenditures. Compared with this golden age of operatic showmanship, typified by Burnacini's and Gallibibbiena's extravagant productions in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, even the "grand opera" of the nineteenth century was unimpressive. Its principal characteristics—the box theater, illusory perspective scenery painted on wings, borders, and backdrops, and lighting by candles and oil lamps—remained unchanged in Europe until the nineteenth century.

Even then, when new technical ideas began to influence the stage equipment, the auditorium itself underwent few changes. Little was done to break the aristocratic isolation of the stage from the audience. Some new ideas for a more democratic theater were advocated in France, but Richard Wagner's Festival Theatre in Bayreuth provided the only really radical departure from the traditional box type.

Wagner built a steeply ascending amphitheater so that an audience "not belonging to a particular class of society, but embracing each of its ranks" could from every seat enjoy an equally undistorted view of the stage.<sup>1</sup> Except for one row of private boxes and a small balcony in the rear, there were neither boxes nor galleries.

In order to eliminate any interference with the sight of the stage, the orchestra was lowered and concealed in a deep pit, called the "mystic abyss." By an ingenious device the architect, Gottfried Semper, blended the front and back walls of the pit into a single sightline, thus achieving the illusion that there existed no orchestra at all. Actually,

## THE BUILDING

the pit, extending in separate descending levels under the stage, held more than a hundred musicians. This arrangement did away with the usual disturbing reflection of the musicians' lights and made the actors on the stage appear taller than they were.

Great care was taken to equip the Bayreuth theater with all the latest technical inventions. Influenced by the beginnings of realism in the German theater, Wagner applied this style to his productions, using a real hearthfire with an actual red-hot poker, a giant snake and dragon which could roll their eyes, steam, and moving scenery. He introduced the completely darkened auditorium, also the curtain which opens from the middle to the sides instead of rolling up from the bottom, and left us the dubious heritage of Brünnhilde's horse Grane. He also employed—at a time when gaslight was still a novelty!—the newly invented magic lantern for producing the effect of the riding Valkyries.

All this realistic stage technique seems strange in contrast with the mythological, super-dimensional concept of the *Ring*, for which the Bayreuth Festival Theatre was built, but it is historically comprehensible and it contributed a great deal to the development of operatic stage equipment.

Wagner himself, however, as stage director of the first *Ring*, seems to have had difficulties with his new realistic stage effects. According to the diary of his stage manager, Richard Fricke, the rainbow, the giant snake, and the steam arising at the disappearance of Alberich were laughed at, and the demolition scene at the end of *Die Götterdämmerung* failed to go off properly. Wagner said to Fricke, "Next year we shall do it all differently."<sup>2</sup>

Even yet the forward-looking nature of Wagner's theater is not understood. With only a few exceptions the old concept of the courtly Italian box theater has continued to dominate the architecture of our grand opera theaters, despite all the changes in social purpose and technical possibilities.

Operatic stage equipment has fared better, in Europe at least, the chief innovations being the result of two inventions: modern machinery and electricity. Gradually these two factors have changed the old illusory perspective peep-show stage into the modern space stage, which actually *builds* its stage picture instead of trying to create it by painting. This development progressed gradually from painted flat

## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

wings, borders, and backdrops to the use of plastic, three-dimensional rocks, trees, and houses, climaxing in the realism of the Hollywood film studios.

Of course, this kind of plastic scenery could no longer be shifted by rolling it around pipes and pulling it up and down. The stage needed more space and machinery for changing solid pieces and even full three-dimensional sets. Particularly in Germany new systems were invented for this purpose. These included the revolving stage or table—first used in Munich in a performance of *Don Giovanni* in 1896—as well as wagon, moving, and elevator stages and various combinations of all of them.

Also, to complete the three-dimensional treatment of outdoor scenery the formerly flat sky-drop was now replaced with the curved cyclorama, which imitates the shape of the sky. At first this was made of canvas, but that material is bound to wave with every draft, so the cyclorama was later built of solid material such as plaster. In this form the curved sky-piece is called the "dome." Various methods have been developed to move the dome in and out of place after setting and before striking the scenery, which is placed or hung within its orbit.

The realistic treatment of space required new methods of lighting. The flat, over-all lighting which in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was provided by candles and oil lamps placed in rows across the front of the stage (footlights), between the wings (wing-lights), and between the borders (border-lights) was not sufficient any longer. Now a kind of lighting was required which could accentuate the third dimension of the space by highlighting certain points and creating shadows, clouds, and other special effects.

When gaslight was introduced about 1820, it became possible for the first time to control the lighting from a central board, the forerunner of the modern switchboard. Of course, this must still have been a somewhat primitive affair and Richard Fricke complained that the new gaslighting did not function correctly at the first performance of the *Ring*.

Modern stage lighting was made possible by the invention of the incandescent lamp. True, we hear of an arc lamp that made the sun in Meyerbeer's *Le Prophète* glow for the first time at the Paris Opéra in 1850, but it was Edison's invention which, after experiments in

## THE BUILDING

1880 and 1881 at the Paris Opéra, was soon generally adopted by theaters and made enormous progress in stage lighting practical.

The dim light of candles, oil lamps, and even gas permitted the use of wavering painted canvas scenery; the intense light of high-powered electric lamps made it almost impossible; every detail was now evident to the audience. Scenery in the foreground of the stage, such as rocks, trees, and houses could actually be built, but what could be done with the backgrounds? Obviously one could not build entire mountains or cities and change them as the scene shifted.

A new medium was found in electrical projections, first "stills" which were thrown on flat screens or gauzes, then on the curved cyclorama. For the latter purpose a new method of designing the necessary slides was developed to offset the distortions of the projected picture. Moving projections were also introduced, not only clouds, fire, and water effects, but pictures which could, for instance, replace the clumsy machinery of the moving canvas settings that Wagner used in his Bayreuth productions.

Actually, the use of such moving scenery, practically unknown in today's grand opera productions in America, goes as far back as its use by Servandoni in Paris during the eighteenth century. Hearing about the sensational effects that Charles Kean achieved with this device in his Shakespearean productions in London, Wagner incorporated it in his plans for the *Ring* and *Parsifal*. Judging from his use of the magic lantern for the "Ride of the Valkyries," there is little doubt that, had film existed in his day, he would have used it for the execution of this scene, and also to replace the moving scenery for the three pictorial transitions in *Das Rheingold* and for Parsifal's two journeys to the Temple of the Grail.

In recent years film has been used to solve operatic problems like these in various places, especially in Germany. It has also been employed in modern grand operas such as Krenek's *Jonny spielt auf*, Milhaud's *Christophe Colomb*, and Antheil's *Transatlantic*.

Clearly, the general tendency in all this modern technical development has been toward greater realism on the stage. But modern producers have recognized that the best and most complete technical machinery can hardly effect a satisfactory scenic production of opera if it is used only for naturalistic interpretation. Mere photographic



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

imitation of nature, even if done with Hollywood-like financial and technical opulence, rarely catches and communicates the emotional significance of opera.

Therefore, European designers from Appia to Sievert, Aravantinos, Preetorius, and Benois, and such Americans as Norman Bel Geddes, Robert Edmond Jones, Donald Oenslager, Lee Simonson, and Jo Mielziner have worked on new and more stylized conceptions of the operatic stage (see Plates 18-37). Unfortunately, under the given conditions their work remains largely plans on paper.

Since we know of so much that would be better, it seems especially too bad that today's grand opera in America suffers from old-fashioned buildings and stage arrangements which, in spite of the use of electricity, are based on the peep-show plan of opera's candlelight origin.

Just why did the traditional type of European opera building suit its own time and place so well, and why does it fit modern America so poorly?

First, the typical old European opera house was small, because it belonged to an emperor or duke who entertained an exclusive aristocratic audience and paid generously for this pleasure. It was built for the purpose of giving only opera and that on a year-round basis. Practically every major city or principality had its own opera house, and some of them—Paris, Vienna, Stuttgart—had two, a larger one for grand opera and a smaller one for more intimate works.

The auditorium, being built of wood, usually had extremely good acoustics, and its bad sightlines did not matter, because the show was given for a king or duke and his court, and the other guests had to be satisfied with the honor of being there at all. For the "people" there were only some top galleries. The magnificent decor of many of our opera auditoriums attests to this heritage of a primarily social function.

The stage was usually twice the size of the auditorium, and it was fully equipped to permit the lavish productions which the host ordered and paid for.

These conditions of size, acoustics, and stage technique were in perfect harmony with the operas performed, many of which were originally commissioned for the particular theater. Fortunately, several of the European opera houses in which some of our famous operas were first

## THE BUILDING

performed are still in existence, so that we can judge the relationship between the style of the work and the size of the theater.

Among these are the Stavovske Divadlo in Prague (977 seats), where the first *Don Giovanni* was performed under Mozart's direction in 1786; the Theater an der Wien (seating about 1000), where Beethoven conducted the first *Fidelio* in 1805; the Bayreuth Festspielhaus (about 1500 seats), for which Wagner wrote and produced the first *Ring* and *Parsifal*; and the Opéra Comique in Paris (1650 seats), where several French operas from *Carmen* to *Pelléas* were given for the first time.

When I heard *Fidelio* performed in 1946 in the Theater an der Wien, I felt the stronger impact of the work because the intimacy of the theater restored the original balance. I also believe that the great effectiveness of the prewar European festival performances—such as those at Bayreuth, in Salzburg (Festspielhaus, about 1600 seats), at Florence's "Pergola" (1600 seats), and at Glyndebourne (600 seats)—came partly from the immediacy of the musical and dramatic experience in the small theaters.

In contrast, of course, is the showmanship of Italian outdoor opera performances of today in the Terme di Caracalla in Rome (18,000 spectators) and the Arena in Verona (13,000).

The early Italian indoor theaters also tended to be larger than those in Germany and France. The Teatro Fenice in Venice, where the first *Rigoletto* and *Traviata* were performed, holds about 2500; La Scala in Milan, the place of the first *Otello* and *Falstaff* and many other important premières, seats 3000; and Florence's modern Politeama, built of stone, accommodates 4500.

In general, however, most European opera houses have between 1500 and 2500 seats. Even the heavily orchestrated Richard Strauss operas were written for performance in theaters of moderate size, such as Dresden (2000); Berlin (1780); Munich's State Opera (1880) and its Prinz Regenten Theatre (1187); and Vienna's State Opera (prior to 1945, 1583 seats with standing room for 730).

America differs in almost all these factors. Here there are only a few opera houses at all, and their form and seating capacities are, for the most part, inadequate.

While the acoustics are fine in the older houses (Philadelphia Acad-

## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

emy of Music, the Metropolitan, Boston Opera House), whose auditoriums are, like the old European houses, built of wood, they are questionable in the newer houses (Chicago Civic Opera, San Francisco's War Memorial Opera House, New York City Center), which are built of stone. The reverse is true in the matter of sightlines. The size and equipment of the stages cannot, except for the Chicago and San Francisco houses, meet the demands of modern operatic production.

Although these American opera houses have seating capacities at least equal to those of the biggest Italian opera houses—the Metropolitan, 3417; Chicago Civic Opera, 3600; San Francisco War Memorial, 3286; Philadelphia Academy of Music, 3023; Boston Opera House, 2976; and New York City Center, 3010—they do not solve the particular problems facing their managers. For except in the case of the Metropolitan, the building is not the property of the opera company and it is not used exclusively for producing opera. It is merely a landlord to the opera company, which rents it for a short season.

Since the building must pay its way and if possible make a profit, it is used also for ballet, light opera, plays, concerts, conventions, lectures, and so on. One auditorium cannot serve all these divergent purposes satisfactorily. As a rule, it is too small to defray the expenses of grand opera production on a self-sustaining basis and too big to be artistically satisfactory either for operas or for plays of the lyric theater.

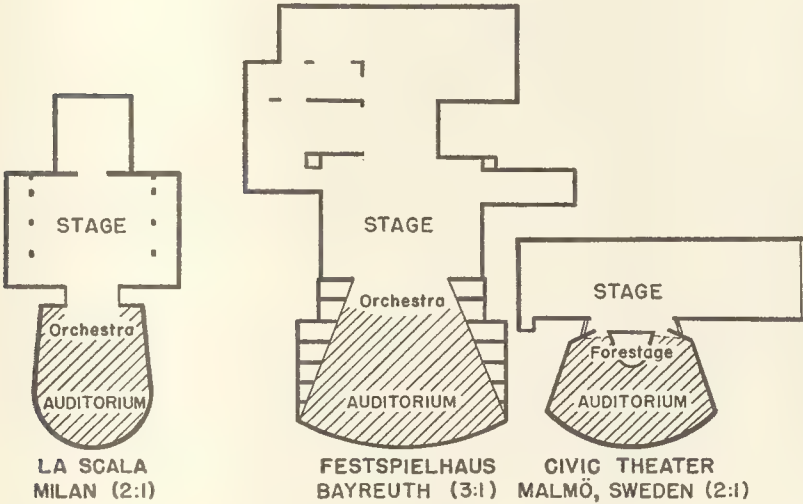
The management of the San Francisco Opera Association reports that although its modern house seats 3286, with standing room for 300, "increased seating capacity, particularly in the middle bracket price scale, is highly desirable but impossible." Earle Lewis, who was in charge of the Metropolitan's box office for more than forty years, said that "one should not raise the prices, but the roof of the Metropolitan, in order to increase the number of seats in the three to three and a half dollar category."

A Metropolitan stage director once complained in Gatti-Casazza's presence that a certain scenic effect was placed too far back on the stage to be seen by those in the last three galleries. "Let them come down!" Gatti is supposed to have answered. Many opera lovers today, facing the alternative between too expensive seats with a good view of the stage and seats at a reasonable cost but with poor visibility, prefer to stay at home.

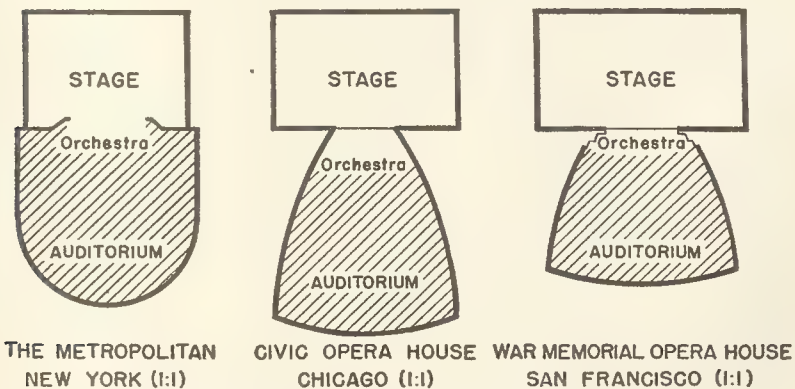
## THE BUILDING

To get the big attendance they must have to pay expenses (as well as to accommodate the crowds that want to come), the major opera companies when touring play in the biggest auditoriums possible, even though these destroy the original visual and acoustical proportions of most of the operas. University theaters like those in Bloomington, Indiana, and Minneapolis, Minnesota, which are used by these guest

### IN EUROPE



### IN AMERICA



Contrast between European and American opera theaters in the proportion of stage size to auditorium size



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

companies, have beautiful modern auditoriums with excellent sight-lines, but their stage space and equipment are usually insufficient to handle the production of grand opera, since they were not built for this purpose.

The proportion between the size of the stage and the auditorium, which in Europe is at a minimum two to one, is in America, at best, one to one. Building space in our big cities being expensive, as little room as possible is given to the stage. Hardly anywhere is the space enough for handling plastic scenery, which requires at least as much room off-stage as is used for the on-stage scenery.

Also lacking nearly everywhere are three essentials in equipment: first, modern machinery to change or remove the scenery, meaning "moving" and "elevator" stages as well as revolving stages; second, provisions for firm placing of projection equipment on solid light bridges on the stage as well as from the auditorium; and third, a solid cyclorama that permits the use of projected scenery without fear of its vibrating on shaky canvas.

On the outdated stage of the Metropolitan even the "traps" are not deeper than three feet. And on modernized stages such as those in the Chicago and San Francisco houses, the machinery for raising sections of the floor, so-called "bridges," is impractical for scenic changes because of the length of time this operation requires.

Much of the difficulty comes from the fact that the construction of opera houses, if undertaken at all, is usually entrusted to architects who understand the problems of building an auditorium but who are unfamiliar with the artistic and technical demands of operatic production. And operatic producers are rarely consulted about the plans. That is how it happened that rehearsal rooms for the soloists, chorus, ballet, and orchestra were forgotten in building the San Francisco opera house.

Also, almost never is enough storage space provided within the building. The Metropolitan's scenery must often be left out in the rain and snow behind the stage on Seventh Avenue. Storehouses are usually far away, and this, considering the daily change of repertoire, adds enormously to the cost of transportation and handling.

It can also cause almost ruinous disruptions of a conductor's or director's work. I still shudder when I recall a rehearsal of *The Marriage of Figaro* with Bruno Walter on the stage of the Chicago Civic

## THE BUILDING

Opera House. Just when the conductor was trying with all his love of Mozartian grace to achieve the most subtle *pianissimo* nuances with the singers, a big door at the side was thrown open with a clatter and a huge truck rattled noisily right onto the stage to unload scenery for that evening's performance. Walter has not conducted any Mozart opera since.

Construction and paint shops for scenery are also mostly insufficient—if, indeed, they belong to the theater at all.

Modern techniques such as the use of film and amplification devices like the microphone, helpful in producing special artistic effects and also in the control of backstage music, are still shunned, and the problem of proper placing of television equipment has not yet been faced. Even air conditioning, which is essential for an economical year-round operation of the building, is missing in several of our opera houses.

While European opera houses usually have beautiful entrance halls and lobbies, in which people can enjoy themselves during intermissions, few American opera theaters show any awareness of the festive uplift which the public can receive from such surroundings. On the other hand, the European builders did not dream of future American democratic audiences who would be driving to the opera from their suburban or outstate homes. So the problems of parking thousands of cars and providing restaurant facilities for visitors coming from a distance are new ones for which the old box theater is not prepared.

Obviously mere copy and adaptation of the old European court opera house, based on different social, artistic, financial, and technical concepts, cannot meet the needs and conditions in America today. We must turn to men of forward-looking and creative minds—men like Norman Bel Geddes, whose ideas for modern community music centers are as yet known only to a small group of professionals or students—for original solutions to the problem of providing adequate housing in America for grand opera and the musical theater in general.

# *Training the* **ARTISTS**

**THE PICTURE** of the elements of grand opera and its production would not be complete without a brief survey of the conditions for training those young artists who, be it as composers and librettists, or as singers, directors, designers, teachers, and critics, are to be the builders of the opera of tomorrow.

In Europe their study and development is integrated with the well-established system of grand opera itself and takes place in three phases: first, schooling with private teachers or at conservatories; then engagements at one of the many smaller government-supported opera companies, where they can gain practical experience; and finally employment as members of a major company, where they can unfold their mature art as part of an ensemble on a year-round basis.

I have already said something about my own experience with this kind of schooling, but I should like to describe it a bit more fully here as a typical example of systematic and gradual training in the operatic arts.

When I attended the opera class at the Vienna State Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts, my dramatic teacher was the chief stage director of the Vienna State Opera, the musical director one of its

## TRAINING THE ARTISTS

leading conductors, and the dance teacher its choreographer. Instruction in scenic design and costumes I received from Alfred Roller, famous stage designer of the same institution.

It should be explained that in Europe, quite in contrast to the practice in America, the study of musical theory and philosophy was quite separate from training in the techniques of music. At the Vienna Academy of Music only practical training in voice, diction, acting, dance, piano, costume, and make-up was given, plus a little history of music. One who was interested in further theoretical studies, such as history and esthetics, had to attend the music department of the university, which offered no practical musical courses at all.

The training of operatic artists took many years. Usually two years were given to the basic discipline of the voice, from "vocalises" (exercises) to words and songs. In the third year the study of operatic arias began, and gradually the acting and singing of scenes and then of full parts followed. Student performances were exclusively devoted to classic operas and were sung in German. The student singer worked his way up from the chorus to small parts and finally, usually during the fourth or fifth year, to leading parts. Our evenings were regularly spent in the opera house, to which we received standing room admissions frequently free of charge.

After completing our studies, having grown from chorister to soloist and from curtain puller to stage director, we readily got an engagement at one of the many operatic stages in the German-speaking countries. I started as singer and third opera stage director at the small municipal theater in Münster in Westphalia, a theater where drama, operetta, and opera were given, and from there I worked my way up to the bigger opera stages of Breslau and Frankfurt-am-Main in Germany, Basel in Switzerland, and the German Theatre in Prague. This was a nine years' experience. Each season lasted at least ten months and I staged more than one opera every four weeks, so that I had directed some ninety-five productions of more than fifty different works, including most of the repertoire operas, by the time I was called to direct operas in Philadelphia and later at the Metropolitan.

It seems quite impossible to me that without this gradual development from school on through experience on smaller stages I should ever have been able to do my work with the major opera companies.

Nor was my experience in the least unusual. Hundreds of operatic



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

artists learned in the same way how to handle the tools of their arts. The Academy in Vienna was only one of many such government-supported opera schools in Europe, some of them with a longer history and tradition than those in Austria and Germany.

In his "Report upon a German Music School to be established in Munich," written in 1865, Richard Wagner pointed out to King Ludwig II the close relationship that had long existed between leading conservatories in France and Italy and their major opera theaters. He told the king:

"In the very name 'Conservatorium' there lies a definition of the kind of functions required from such an institution. Such a school should maintain, 'conserve,' the classic style of a ripe stage in the art's development; and it should do so by fostering and loyally handing down the proper mode-of-rendering [Vortragsweise] of those standard works, in particular, which have formed and rounded off a period of artistic prime and made it classical. . . . The mode-of-rendering, as cherished and maintained in the conservatories, originated at those great musical institutions for which the outstanding artists of the nation had directly worked and written. The conservatories of Naples, Milan, and Paris preserved and fostered what the achievements of the theaters of *San Carlo*, *della Scala*, and the *Académie de musique*, with assistance from the nation's own peculiar taste, had previously matured into a recognized classical form."

Wagner maintained that to establish a German conservatory of the same type as these that had done so much for opera in Italy and France, "it is of the first importance that singers gifted with dramatic talent should receive a proper training in voice production." In this active interest in the method of singing he was only following the tradition of composers since the beginnings of opera in Florence.

As early as 1601 Caccini in the introduction to his *Nuove Musiche* had dealt with the basic problems of the classic Italian bel canto, and in Naples, where this style of singing blossomed, renowned composers like Scarlatti, Feo, Porpora, Vinci, and Leo were active as voice teachers. Toward the end of the eighteenth century a manual of vocal method of the Paris Conservatory was published with Cherubini, Gosse, and Méhul listed among its authors. In Germany Johann Adam Hiller, who laid the basis for German opera with his *Singspiele* (song plays), also wrote two books on the art of singing.

## TRAINING THE ARTISTS

Wagner continued the efforts to establish a German vocal style. He engaged the voice teacher Julius Hey as "technical voice consultant" at the Bayreuth rehearsals of 1875 and 1876.<sup>1</sup> And when the plan to repeat the festivals in 1877 did not materialize, Wagner summoned the representatives of the local chapters of his patrons' association to Bayreuth and in the theater there gave them a lecture about a "Singers' and Conductors' School" he wanted to organize. He intended to direct its activities himself and to take part personally in its exercises at least three times a week. The school never came into being, but Wagner's program for it may still be read in the tenth volume of his complete works.

He insisted that operatic training, aimed at correct interpretation of the operatic repertoire, should be based on mastery of the classic vocal technique and of the several national styles that have grown from it. He added instruction in rhetoric and gymnastics as a second step, and finally education in harmony and in analysis of the works with the help of piano-playing.

We have already listed the "several national styles" that Wagner ranked next in importance to voice production itself—styles resulting from differences in climate, temperament, and language. To name them again, they are the *bel canto* of Italian opera, favored by the drawn-out pure vowels and spare consonants of the national language; the style of French opera, which, influenced by the tradition of the *tragédie classique*, relied more on poetic beauty of declamation than on vocal effects; and the dramatically accentuated interpretation of German opera—handicapped, according to Wagner, by a "tongue with vowels mostly short and mute, extensible only at the cost of intelligibility, hemmed in by consonants, most expressive indeed, but heaped regardless of all euphony."

In spite of these differences the great national styles of singing, crystallized in treatises like Tosi's *Opinioni de' cantori antichi e moderni* (Bologna, 1723), the voice manual of Bérard (Paris, 1755), or Manuel Garcia's *Traité complet de l'art du chant* (1847), agreed on the fundamental principles of voice placement and methods of ornamentation, diction, and the enunciation of consonants.

Garcia enumerates four kinds of operatic singing: (1) The recitative, differentiated into the "recitativo parlante" (spoken recitative), used only in comic operas, and the "recitativo instrumentale" (sung

## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

recitative), which can be either free or in time. (2) The "canto spinato," simple, broad singing which requires the "portar la voce" (sustained singing) and the "messa di voce" (emission of the voice from the softest pianissimo to the utmost fortissimo). (3) The "canto fiorito" (florid singing), marked by speed, grace, and bravura. (4) The "canto declamato" (declamatory singing), in which the actor should dominate the singer. In comic opera the *canto declamato* becomes the *canto parlante* (singing in the manner of speaking), of which Garcia says, "Le style parlante est l'âme de l'opéra buffa" (the speaking style is the soul of comic opera).

The art of operatic singing, as we have pointed out, was eventually submerged in the stream of the modern symphonic orchestra. Composers lost their interest in vocal technique and their knowledge of it. It is ironic that Wagner, with all his theoretical recognition of the essential importance of singing techniques, was the first to offset his own doctrine by his treatment of the voice as part of the orchestral fabric.

The German musical authority Marpurg in the eighteenth century said, "The augmented third, the diminished and augmented sixth, besides the diminished octave, lie beyond the realm of the art of singing," and Mannstein, quoting Marpurg a century later, insisted that "On the whole, most augmented and diminished intervals seem to be totally unsingable."<sup>2</sup> But Wagner and his successors made these and other heavy demands on the human voice which led to a decline in the art of singing.

Nonetheless, European music schools continued to assign basic importance to the art of skillful manipulation and control of the voice, and the many opera companies of lesser size provided the schools' graduates with experience in the traditional styles of performance and interpretation.

Operatic training in America takes place under very different conditions. Although there is an enormous amount of talent here, no adequate system has been established to develop and make use of it to the full. Numerous, all too numerous, opportunities are available for study with private teachers and in conservatories, but rarely is there any organic relationship between the leading music schools and

## TRAINING THE ARTISTS

the major opera companies, and there are not enough smaller companies to take care of the intermediate training.

From time to time some of the better conservatories have had connections with grand opera companies. For instance, the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston, which added an opera school to its voice department in 1901 and gave several performances of complete operas under Wallace Goodrich, materially assisted the organization of the Boston Opera Company in 1908 and 1909 by providing the company with orchestra and chorus members, singers, stage directors, and one conductor.

The Curtis Institute of Music, which organized an opera department under William Wymetal Sr. in 1927, collaborated occasionally in performances by grand opera companies in Philadelphia.

The Juilliard School of Music has had an opera department since 1929 and maintained a close relationship with the Metropolitan, contributing generously to keep it going during the critical years of the 1930s.

The Peabody Conservatory of Music in Baltimore, which has had an opera department since 1909, produced complete operas under the leadership of former Metropolitan stage director Ernst Lert and formed its own school opera company.

But such sporadic connections are far from the organic relationship between school and company that characterizes opera in Europe. We shall see later how more recently some schools have cooperated in local community opera projects or have organized their own performing groups.

Besides lacking an organic contact with the leading opera companies, operatic study is made more difficult by the American practice of singing the standard operas in three foreign languages. Only in the rarest cases can the American student succeed in mastering all these languages and styles satisfactorily; in most cases his work must remain an automatic process. Add to this fact the inclination to understatement of expression inherent in the American's nature, and it is not surprising that his interpretation is often one of reporting the operatic part rather than directly expressing it.

Much can be learned from attending performances, listening to recordings, and reading books written by great performers. But the



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

literature on operatic production is as yet extremely scarce, especially in English. Theoretical works like Appia's *La Musique et la mise-en-scène*, Carl Hagemann's *Die Kunst der Buehne*, containing a part on operatic stage direction, and Ernst Lert's *Mozart auf dem Theater* have not been translated into English.<sup>3</sup>

Few operatic singers have bothered to explain their interpretations in writing. Notable exceptions include Lilli Lehmann's *How to Sing*, Feodor Chaliapin's *Pages from My Life* and *Man and Mask*, and Lotte Lehmann's books, among which *My Many Lives* describes her interpretations of many roles. The interesting studies by Victor Maurel (Verdi's first Iago and Falstaff) of the production of *Otello* and *Don Giovanni* and his authentic remarks about *Falstaff*, Lilli Lehmann's study of *Fidelio*, and Anna Bahr-Mildenburg's analysis of the interpretation of *Tristan and Isolde*, again are not yet translated into English.<sup>4</sup>

Helpful to read, too, are Wagner's various essays and directions about the performances of his works, Verdi's interesting letters, and a goodly number of books about famous singers and other artists.

But real experience can be gained only by study and actual performance of the operas themselves. And here the young American artist meets his greatest obstacle in the fewness of smaller opera companies, their short seasons, and their limited repertoire. Even if he is lucky enough to get an engagement with one of them, it almost never pays him enough to live on, so that he is forced to find additional work in churches, concerts, radio, night clubs, if not in completely unrelated fields, leaving him little time for the proper preparation of his specific operatic tasks. And the short seasons and four-language system offer little incentive to the American singer to study for a career in the opera chorus.

Also, the limited repertoire of most of the smaller—and even bigger—companies practically excludes the performance of demanding works like Wagner's operas or Verdi's *Aïda* and *Otello*. In consequence there is almost no opportunity for the development of new *dramatic* voices, which requires constant physical training and practice in actual performance over a long period. American training opportunities mostly produce only singers for the musical theater of Broadway dimensions and for the microphone media.

Today the point has been reached where, in spite of hundreds of

## TRAINING THE ARTISTS

good voices, there are practically no new, truly dramatic voices to be found—no singers for Italian dramatic roles such as *Otello* or *Norma*; no Wagnerian sopranos, tenors, and heroic baritones; no real contraltos or low basses.

It is equally disturbing that for these same reasons of few small companies and limited repertoires, American composers, librettists, and directors find it difficult to gain the practical experience indispensable to their professions.

Less than in Europe can the major opera companies provide the necessary intermediate work for fledgling artists. At the Metropolitan I have often heard complaints because a certain role had not been assigned to this or that young American singer whose voice was obviously of better quality than that of the seasoned singer who got the part. But I knew the management had been forced to choose the older singer because previous experience in the part was indispensable for a sure performance under the given conditions of a crowded schedule and scant rehearsal time. The same consideration limits the choice of new conductors and directors.

The question of selecting operatic artists for important assignments with a major opera company cannot be settled by taking undue risks, or by giving vent to personal likes and dislikes, or by following a set policy of chauvinism. Because all these motives are forgotten at eight o'clock when the curtain goes up; then only one yardstick counts: the quality of the artist's performance in its effect on the audience.

Before World War II some young American artists went to Europe to acquire their practical training. When the outbreak of hostilities made this impossible, some found substitute opportunities in the newly organized opera workshops and other performing university groups. These were free of the economic problems that haunt opera companies, for often, being part of an endowed educational institution, they operated with student, nonpaid employees.

Their activities proved to be (as we shall see later) most valuable for the development of a modern repertoire and progressive methods of opera production, but they have been less successful in training singers for opera. Frequently their directors, though able teachers of dramatic technique, were inexperienced in the particular requirements of opera and lacked the ability to develop what is the foundation of opera: namely, knowledge of vocal technique and operatic styles.

## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

A performance of Weber's *Der Freischütz* would be a good way to start the student toward learning the style of later German opera, *La Traviata* of Italian, *Faust* of French, and Handel's *Acis and Galatea* of English opera. But these directors, experts in drama rather than in opera, preferred to produce difficult modern works for which mature, already thoroughly trained voices are required.

True, they developed fine relaxed actors, who pronounced their words in clearly enunciated English, who did not look at the conductor's beat—who, in short, fulfilled in every way the ideal of their directors: good modern theater. But only a few of the students seemed to be aware that through disregard of vocal technique and operatic styles they were trained to be artists of the lyric theater or of musical comedy rather than of opera.

From time to time, of course, a beautiful voice was discovered in one of these performances. Then usually a manager got hold of the talented artist and he or she was soon hailed as a new Caruso or Ponselle and either made an abrupt leap to the stage of the Met or began a lucrative, publicity-backed career in radio or on the concert stage—only to fade from sight and favor after a short time because success had come falsely and too soon, because lack of thorough training and constructive cultivation had prevented the organic growth of young talent.

With grand opera itself on such insecure ground, it is not surprising to find the paths leading to it beset with related problems. Systematic training and full constructive use of operatic artists will come only when the art itself is established solidly in the life of the American community.

## **PART TWO · AMERICAN OPERA IN THE MAKING**





# OPERA

## *on Broadway*

TO AN AMERICAN, "Broadway" means the legitimate theater and musical plays. It does not include the Metropolitan Opera, although the Met's main entrance is located at 1417 Broadway.

But "Broadway" has its own opera. Not the pretentious grand opera of the European tradition, associated with the Met, but a sort of American folk opera. The word *opera*, though, is often avoided on the programs and a variety of ruses are used to disguise the actual nature of the offerings. To such an extent is Broadway afraid of losing its audience if it appears to go "highbrow." Or, more accurately perhaps, to such an extent has the conception of opera as an import, remote from life, and sung in a foreign tongue alienated a large segment of the American public.

The native opera produced on Broadway is not remote in subject matter. George Gershwin found in DuBose and Dorothy Heyward's play *Porgy* a plot from American life that provided the exalted mood needed for musical treatment. The story of the crippled Porgy and his woman Bess, which takes place in Catfish Row, a Negro tenement on the waterfront of Charleston, South Carolina, is full of emotional

## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

characters and actions, giving Gershwin plenty of opportunities to write lyric solo numbers and elaborate ensembles in which the night life of the tenement courtyard is set to music. There is dancing, a mother's lullaby, and the men's crap game; the lamentation at the body of the murdered Robbins; the picnic party on Kittiwah Island; the storm scene. Even the recitative is used extensively.

All this makes *Porgy and Bess* no less an opera than *Cavalleria Rusticana*, and Gershwin's work, first performed by the Theatre Guild in 1935, has since established itself as the first real American opera.

Virgil Thomson chose a different means of justifying musical treatment. He used not only Negro performers, but also the literary "dadaism" of Gertrude Stein's words for this purpose in his opera *Four Saints in Three Acts*. The chorus, for instance, sings the following prologue: "To know to know to love her so. Four saints prepare for saints. It makes it well fish. Four saints it makes it well fish. Four saints prepare for saints. It makes it well well fish. It makes it well fish prepare for saints."

In his foreword to the score Thomson advised his listeners: "Please do not try to construe the words of this opera literally or to seek in it any abstruse symbolism. If, by means of the poet's liberties with logic and the composer's constant use of the simplest elements in our musical vernacular, something is here evoked of the childlike gaiety and mystical strength of lives devoted in common to a non-materialistic end, the authors will consider their message to have been communicated."<sup>1</sup>

And Maurice Grosser, who prepared the scenario, gives the following introduction to the opera in the printed score: "*Four Saints in Three Acts* is both an opera and a choreographic spectacle. Imaginary but characteristic incidents from the lives of the saints constitute the action. Its scene is laid in sixteenth-century Spain. Its principal characters are Saint Teresa of Avila, Saint Ignatius Loyola, and their respective confidants, Saint Settlement and Saint Chavez—both of these last without historical prototypes. These are the four saints referred to in the title."<sup>2</sup> Other characters are the Compère and Commère, who in the original production were dressed in modern style. They discuss among themselves and announce to the audience the progress of the story.

The two-hour opera was first performed in Hartford, Connecticut,

## ON BROADWAY

in 1934, under the auspices of the "Friends and Enemies of Modern Music," with Alexander Smallens as conductor and Frederick Ashton and John Houseman in charge of the staging. According to Gilbert Seldes, "The work was produced with a great sense of style, beginning with Miss Stettheimer's settings made of lace and cellophane, and looking like a child's dream of rock candy, and continuing through the costumes and choreography, the lights and all other elements involved."<sup>3</sup> About half of the score has been recorded in an RCA album with the composer conducting.

Virgil Thomson and Gertrude Stein collaborated on another opera, *The Mother of Us All*, which was first performed at Columbia University in 1947. According to the authors, "'The Mother of Us All' is a pageant. Its theme is the winning in the United States of political rights for women. Its story is the life and career of Susan B. Anthony (1820-1906). Some of the characters are historical, others imaginary. They include figures as widely separated in time as John Quincy Adams and Lillian Russell. Through poetic license they are all shown in the opera as personally acquainted or associated in public life."

The opera uses not only historical characters such as Daniel Webster, Andrew Johnson, John Adams, Ulysses Grant, and others, but also Gertrude Stein and Virgil Thomson themselves as narrators. The whole is a tasty spiritual cocktail that gives the desired emotional uplift.

Like *Four Saints*, *The Mother of Us All* uses an original orchestration calling for five players each for wind and brass instruments, strings, a harp, a piano, and a collection of percussion instruments. The work lasts about an hour and a half and has been produced by a number of smaller groups.

Marc Blitzstein's *The Cradle Will Rock*, although called a "play in music," aimed at a new type of down-to-earth American opera. Here no attempt was made to escape into emotional worlds. Quite to the contrary, Blitzstein explained:

"It was to be colloquial—the idea dictated that. You cannot very well conceive a work about Steelton, America, with its implication of millhands, foremen, labor organizers, thugs, cops, middle-class shopkeepers, professionals, steel magnates and streetwalkers and still hope to set its text in anything but the vernacular. . . . 'Operatic' tone was to be avoided, theatre tone was the point.



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

"But it also was to be an opera. That is, the music and the drama were to have a serious and mutual relation. . . .

"The form which grew out of trying to solve these problems happened without a great deal of initiative from me. I used whatever was indicated and at hand. There are recitatives, arias, revue-patters, tap-dances, suites, chorals, silly symphony, continuous, incidental commentary music, lullaby music—all pitchforked into it. There are also silences treated musically, and the music which is practically silent."<sup>4</sup>

The history of this work was a stormy one. The first production, a WPA project, never got beyond the dress rehearsal, which took place before an invited audience on June 15, 1937, at the Maxine Elliott Theatre. It was staged by Orson Welles, conducted by Lehman Engel, produced by John Houseman, and lighted by Feder. The next day the play was banned and the defiant group moved to another theater, where for two weeks they staged a makeshift performance with Blitzstein conducting from an upright piano on the stage and the performers singing their parts from various places in the audience. A third production, in concert form at the Windsor and Mercury theaters, ran for 124 performances. Ten years later, in 1947, Leonard Bernstein presented the musical play, also in concert form, at the New York City Center. So Broadway has not seen this work in its intended form. But it has been given in eighteen colleges and little theaters.

Blitzstein's *No for an Answer*, which was first performed in New York's Mecca Auditorium (later the City Center Theater) in 1941, had more extended singing and was called an opera. As in the *Cradle*, Blitzstein wrote his own book and treated social problems with no reserve.

*No for an Answer* takes place "in and around the Diogenes Social Club at Crest Lake, a summer resort in Eastern U.S." in mid-September 1939. It tells the story of a group of waiters and hotel workers who are left without work when the summer season is over and are prevented from organizing a union by resort operators and the police. It ends with the murder of the union organizer and the burning of the Diogenes Social Club, where the workers meet.

Brooks Atkinson said of this work, "In recent years the dramatic stage has had no better example of the power of music to create men and women through song. No labor union ever had a better concert master."<sup>5</sup>

## ON BROADWAY

In these works Blitzstein tried to solve the problem of putting down-to-earth American scenes and themes in operatic form. As Aaron Copland phrased it:

"Perhaps Blitzstein's outstanding achievement was the fact that for the first time in a serious stage work he gave the typical American tough guy musical characterization. Just imagine what it means to make a taxi driver sing so that the result sounds natural. In *No for an Answer* the composer has one of the little guys, in this case a pan-handler, sing a song in accents so true as to make us feel that no one has ever before even attempted the problem of finding a voice for all those American regular fellows who seem so much at home everywhere except on the operatic stage. If the opera had nothing more than this to recommend it, its historical importance would be considerable."<sup>6</sup>

In 1949 Blitzstein took a remarkable step toward his aim of realistic American opera in his adaptation of Lillian Hellmann's play *The Little Foxes* under the title *Regina*. For this he wrote book, lyrics, and score. The mercilessly cruel family story about two greedy brothers and their heartless sister is carried out in full operatic treatment, changing from spoken words freely and frequently to sung recitatives and a great variety of more elaborate musical forms. Although the true nature of the work was still hidden behind the term "musical drama," this was, without any doubt, full-fledged American opera.

Similar to Blitzstein's works in its use of a theme of contemporary social significance is Aaron Copland's "play opera" in two acts, *The Second Hurricane*, which was written for high school performance. All its parts may be taken by children, and it was first performed in 1937 by 150 children under the auspices of the music school of the Henry Street Settlement at the Neighborhood Playhouse in New York. It was staged by Orson Welles and conducted by Lehman Engel.

The story tells of an aviator who is doing rescue work in a hurricane and flood area. In need of volunteer helpers, he finds them in a local school. He is flying the children to the danger area when warning comes of a second hurricane's approach. Because of engine trouble, the pilot is forced to land on a hill, where he leaves the children while he flies to the nearest field to have his engine repaired. Disorder starts among the children when they are alone and none are willing to accept orders or to cooperate. Only when the second hurricane strikes and they are in danger do they feel the need of working together. Later

## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

they are saved and enter cooperatively into the work of flood relief. They have learned that life is better with everyone pulling together.

The music of the opera, which lasts about an hour and a half, consists of simple arias and choruses and requires an orchestra of twenty. The staging, too, is to be as simple as possible, with no attempt at realistic scenery. There are bleachers on either side of the stage, one for a pupils' chorus, the other for a parents' chorus. Between is the playing area for the action, and in back of this, on a platform, sits the orchestra, with the conductor facing the audience and performers.

Folklore is another kind of American idiom that fits the requirements of opera. Douglas Moore used it successfully when he chose Stephen Vincent Benét's tale of "The Devil and Daniel Webster" for his one-act folk opera of the same title. The story is laid in New Hampshire in the 1840s. It begins with a country festival celebrating the marriage of the farmer Jabez Stone, who has become amazingly prosperous because he has sold his soul to the Devil. He is saved by the oratorical powers of the great Daniel Webster, in a dramatic trial before a jury of the damned souls of famous American traitors. The Devil is driven out of New Hampshire and "the case ends with pie breakfast, as it should."

This story, combining folk elements with the romantic realm of fairy tale, lent itself well to operatic treatment. The work, about an hour in length, employs singing and speaking solo voices, a chorus, and an orchestra of sixteen players in addition to the strings; a small orchestration with electric organ is also available.

For his next work, *Giants in the Earth*, Douglas Moore chose one of the big, sweeping themes of American history: the hazards, physical and mental, of pioneering on the great open prairies of the farther Midwest. Arnold Sundgaard as librettist adapted for musical treatment the powerfully moving novel of the same name by O. E. Rølvaag, and the three-act opera was given its first performance by Columbia University in the spring of 1951.

Moore's chamber opera, *White Wings*, was actually written in 1935, but it was not performed until 1949, when the Julius Hartt School of Music in Hartford, Connecticut, staged it. It is based on a play by Philip Barry that deals with the fate of the New York street cleaners at the turn of the century when the horse was driven from the streets

## ON BROADWAY

by the advent of the automobile. Here opera had surely come a long way from the lofty home of Daphne and Orpheus where it originated. But its audience, too, had moved far from the ways and the interests of Florentine nobles.

Kurt Weill was another who attempted to set to music a story significant for its realism: Elmer Rice's play called *Street Scene*. Its action takes place during the heat of summer on a sidewalk in New York City, in front of a poor brownstone walk-up apartment house; the subject matter is all the little joys, hopelessness, and crime that linger there. The first performance took place in Philadelphia on December 16, 1946, the first New York performance on January 9, 1947.

In this work the old problem of opera became acute. Can photographic realism, which so many Americans seem to prefer on Broadway as well as in Hollywood, be a friend of opera? John Mason Brown analyzed the difficulty: "It springs from the simple fact that the realism of 'Street Scene' and the convention of opera are Montagues and Capulets. Worse than contradicting themselves, they destroy each other."<sup>7</sup> Consequently, while Weill's lighter numbers were praised, the more operatic numbers, especially the recitatives, were considered unnatural.

Kurt Weill had been a successful composer of operas and modern song-plays in Europe. In *Die Dreigroschen Oper* (a modern version of *The Beggar's Opera*) and *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahogany* (1929), he had used jazz elements and, in the latter work, American folk tunes before he came to this country. Here he tried to find the right formula for an American opera, experimenting carefully to find the precise dose of operatic form which the realistic Broadway theater would accept in its "musicals."

He tried a good-sized dose in his first American musical play, Paul Green's *Johnny Johnson* (1936), which Green called "the musical biography of a common soldier whose natural common sense runs counter to a sophisticated civilization"; in the operetta *Knickerbocker Holiday* (1938), adapted from Maxwell Anderson's story of silver-legged Peter Stuyvesant; and in *The Firebrand of Florence* (1945), a comedy about Benvenuto Cellini. He lessened the dose in *Lady in the Dark* (1941), which mixed psychoanalysis, jazz, and revolving



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

stages with great success, and in *One Touch of Venus* (1943), a play about a Greek statue which comes to life, is confused by the hullabaloo of modern society, and returns ruefully to her former lifeless state.

Weill used a medium portion of operatic ingredients in the "vaudeville" *Love Life* (1948), which deals in a series of episodes with the deterioration in American marital relations from 1791 to 1948. Between the episodes the chorus comments in songs of various types about politics, economics, and love.

Weill's last musical drama opened on Broadway in 1949 on the night before the première of Blitzstein's *Regina*. Called *Lost in the Stars*, it was Maxwell Anderson's dramatization of Alan Paton's novel *Cry, the Beloved Country*, which Weill had set to music. This tragic story of a black parson and a white planter in South Africa, suggesting that a peaceful solution of racial problems may be found in the recognition of a common humanity, offered great possibilities for musical composition. Weill used them to write one of his best scores, contrasting songs of great simplicity with extended numbers for the commenting chorus.

Weill's achievements in the direction of truly American opera gave us good reason to expect much more of him, but his untimely death in 1950 set an end to these hopes.

With the sure operatic instinct of the Italian, Gian-Carlo Menotti seemed to need no period of stylistic experimentation. He simply sat down, wrote his own books, composed the music, and was successful from the start.

His first opera, *Amelia Goes to the Ball*, was written in Italian *opera buffa* style. It was first performed by the opera department of the Curtis Institute of Music at the New Amsterdam Theatre in New York in 1937, and was presented the following year at the Metropolitan. Its scene is laid in Milan during the 1890s. Amelia wants to go to a ball, but does not succeed in getting either her husband or her lover to take her. The various jumbled incidents belonging to a real *opera buffa* bring it about that the husband is sent to a hospital and the lover to jail. The police are brought in and Amelia's tears touch their chief so much that he gallantly escorts her to the ball. As they depart, the chorus of neighbors points the moral of the story: "If a woman sets her heart on going to a ball—to a ball she will go."

Menotti's second work, a serious opera called *Island God*, was writ-

## ON BROADWAY

ten in the traditional grand opera vein. It, too, was staged at the Metropolitan.

With the "grotesque opera in 14 scenes," *The Old Maid and the Thief*, Menotti moved his works to the American scene. The action of this farcical piece, which is subtitled "How a Virtuous Woman Makes a Thief of an Honest Man," takes place "in a small town somewhere in the United States" at the present time. The opera was commissioned and given its first performance by the National Broadcasting Company in 1939. Two years later it was presented in stage form by the Philadelphia Opera Company. Because of the amusing plot, the small cast of four characters, and a simple orchestration, this one-hour opera is one of the works most frequently given by small opera companies.

Menotti's next work, *The Medium*, was a true Broadway hit. It was first performed at Columbia University in 1946 and started its successful run on Broadway the following year. In this "tragedy" in two acts Menotti struck a very successful balance between modern surroundings ("The action takes place in Madame Flora's parlor in our time. A squalid room in a flat on the outskirts of a great city") and the emotionalism of the psychic medium who is destroyed by her own tricks. This mixture of realism and spiritualism, the use of a mute as one of the leading characters, and some very effective music created a semi-Freudian version of opera that conquered the American theater audience, and much of Europe as well.

*The Medium* was given on Broadway paired in a double bill with a short modern *opera buffa*, *The Telephone*, as a curtain raiser. Both works were staged by Menotti himself.

*The Telephone* was originally written for the Ballet Society in New York and was first performed with *The Medium* by that organization in 1947. As the curtain goes up, Lucy is in her modern apartment busy-ing herself in operatic coloraturas at the telephone. She is so busy that her lover, Ben, cannot even get a chance to propose marriage to her. Finally he gets a bright idea. He goes to the nearest telephone booth, calls her, and makes his proposal.

The economical apparatus of these two works—two singing, one pantomime, and three small parts in *The Medium*; two roles in *The Telephone*, with an orchestra of eight players plus strings—make them practical productions for small operatic groups.

## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

*The Consul*, Menotti's next work, is a full-length musical drama dealing with the ruinous effects of modern bureaucracy. Not only has it repeated the success of *The Medium* on Broadway, but it has been accepted for performance by more European opera theaters than probably any other American opera. ~~it~~

Another American work, *The Barrier*, made its way from the school stage of Columbia University to Broadway in the fall of 1950. Its libretto is by Langston Hughes, based on his short story "Father and Son," which he later successfully dramatized under the title *Mulatto*. The action of the opera, a tragedy in two acts, is laid in the postwar South and deals with contemporary race problems. Its music was composed by Jan Meyerowitz and its original score called for an orchestra of sixteen. In the short-lived Broadway production Lawrence Tibbett and Muriel Rahn played the leading roles.

These works, starting with Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*, make a list quite long enough to prove that American opera has successfully taken its place on Broadway. But there are others that might equally well appear there. Leaving aside the grand operas by Americans like Deems Taylor, Howard Hanson, Richard Hageman, Walter Damrosch, and Bernard Rogers which have been staged at the Metropolitan, we can still name a number of good American operas that have been performed only in music schools, practically the only place in America where experiments with modern operas can be made.

Louis Gruenberg's "fairy opera for the childlike," composed to a libretto by John Erskine called *Jack and the Beanstalk*, was commissioned and first performed by the Juilliard School of Music in 1931. Gruenberg agreed to the theories for a libretto which Erskine outlined as follows:

"The first theory is that a libretto should be entertaining, and it should be comedy.

"The second theory is that a libretto should be based on a plot already familiar to the audience. The pleasure of recognition belongs to art. The satisfaction of curiosity belongs, perhaps, to journalism or to anything else which furnishes information, but wherever it belongs, it is rarely found in an opera performance. There, if you don't know the story before the curtain rises, the singers are not likely to let you in on the secret.

"The third theory is that a libretto should be the barest outline, an

## ON BROADWAY

unadorned structure, and the words should be chosen not for their own sake but to support the music. If a libretto were self-sufficient poetry, to add music would be an impertinence."<sup>8</sup>

In the libretto for *Jack and the Beanstalk* Erskine used the fairy tale in his own way to show how courage finds its reward. Jack wins the three treasures—the gold, the hen, and the magic harp, and with them the princess—and kills the giant, who falls down the beanstalk. Among the characters is an amusing cow that makes critical comments on Jack's thoughts.

Olin Downes said of Gruenberg's score: "It is couched in wholly fanciful, impersonal and melodic terms. It is as if Mr. Gruenberg sat himself down in a mood of relaxation and careless pleasure in his task, and, reinforced by the technique he has won so hardly and so well, tossed off a series of scenes with the informality of a set of sketches for a children's play. But this is done with complete authority and sureness."<sup>9</sup>

It was some two years later that Gruenberg's more ambitious work, *Emperor Jones*, was presented at the Metropolitan. Based on a play by Eugene O'Neill, this opera tells the story of the Negro Jones who made himself "emperor" against the will of the natives of an island in the West Indies. Haunted by the revolt of his subjects, but still more by his own hallucinations about the victims of his former crimes, he turns the silver bullet from his pistol against himself and the natives dance around his body. The opera makes effective use of the spiritual "Standin' in the Need of Prayer," which may be heard in the recording by Lawrence Tibbett. (

John Erskine also provided the book for *Helen Retires*, an opera by George Antheil which was presented at the Juilliard School of Music in 1934. Erskine in his novels had proved himself a master at the satirical treatment of the problems of the aging Helen. His operatic book dealt with her "last" love affair.

According to the author, "Helen made a sort of inventory of her life to see if she had missed anything, and decided that she had: she had missed love! She made up her mind that before she died she really would like one good love affair. The only eligible candidate she can think of is Achilles, whom she has never met and who unfortunately is long dead, but she claims she loves his soul." She invades the Island of the Blessed, conquers the ghost of the immortal hero, and takes



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

him with her to a secluded spot. After enjoying the perfection of love, she is satisfied, sends him back to the world of shadows, and prepares for eternal retirement. But a young fisherman "spoils her hope of integrity and peace by reminding her that she has formed one incurable habit. She commands the hearts of all men who look on her."

Antheil used a chorus, placed in two groups on opposite sides of the stage, to utter reflections on the changing moods of the play. Frederick Kiesler's settings relied entirely on lighting and projection, and of this the official statement of the Juilliard School of Music said: "It was used for the first time in this country and it greatly reduced the cost of production since the settings were entirely negligible. The cost, including the renting of the projection machines, was quoted at \$175 per act, or a total of \$525 for 'Helen Retires.'"<sup>10</sup> And for the departure to the Island of the Blessed, Helen used a submerging submarine boat that was provided by means of a film!

*Helen Retires* is not George Antheil's only venture in opera. In 1930 he wrote and composed *Transatlantic*, which, though it did not reach the stage of the Metropolitan, has been performed at the municipal opera house in Frankfurt-am-Main, Germany. It deals with events in an American presidential campaign in various contemporary locales, including an ocean liner, a Child's restaurant, and the Brooklyn bridge. More recently Antheil has been working as a composer in Hollywood.

Ernst Bacon's *A Tree on the Plains* has been given by several school opera groups. It was first performed by Converse College at the Spartanburg Festival in South Carolina in 1942. The one-hour work, which was one of three operas commissioned by the League of Composers in celebration of its twentieth anniversary, is "a play about the people and the hours of one of those little pine board houses that you may see on the plains of the southwest." It deals with the daily routine of life on the plains: the cowboy, the turning wheel of the mill, the bellow of the cattle, the blessing of the rain.

The composer's description of the music puts it into the class of folk opera: "It must be mentioned here that none of these people will sound vocally like 'opera' singers. There are no arias, but plenty of songs; much declamative melody for dialogue; some crooning, and where genuine, native vocal eloquence is wanted, then these people will be vocally eloquent, and their souls will sound in their voices."

## ON BROADWAY

These are only a few of the operas by American composers that have been performed in opera schools and workshops. There are many others, by Otto Luening, Roger Sessions, Paul Nordoff, Normand Lockwood, Bernard Wagenaar, Randall Thompson, Albert Stoessel, Vittorio Giannini, Bernard Rogers, Lukas Foss. And among successful composers who may be counted on for future contributions in the form of opera we may certainly include Samuel Barber.

In surveying this field of modern operas that treat present-day subjects in terms of musical theater rather than of grand opera, it would be narrow-minded indeed to overlook the works of this kind written by European composers. For in many respects their operas prepared the way for the Americans. Many of these Europeans are now living in this country and have influenced, by their work as composers and teachers, the new generation of American composers.

Actually, some European composers recognized the necessity of bringing grand opera down to simpler forms even before World War I. In 1909 Arnold Schoenberg's monodrama *Erwartung* (Expectation) compressed opera into its most concentrated form in a one-act play expressing the inner feelings of a woman searching for her dead lover in a moonlit forest.

In 1918 Igor Stravinsky brought the most timely problem, the returning soldier, onto the stage in his *L'Histoire du Soldat* (The Tale of the Soldier). It was composed as a modern popular ballad opera, with spoken dialogue, musical "numbers," and an orchestra of only seven instruments.

Paul Hindemith's amusing one-act sketch, *Hin und zurück* (There and Back), also calls for only seven instruments. The farcical action starts with the sneezing of a deaf aunt in a modern home; a young wife receives a letter; a jealous husband shoots her; the body is carried away on a stretcher; the husband jumps out of the window. Then a celestial ambassador upsets the human logic and both action and music go into reverse. The husband jumps into the room from the window, the stretcher is carried in with the body, and so on until the old aunt sneezes again.

This fifteen-minute "melodrama" was first performed in Baden-Baden, Germany, in 1927 and is frequently given by smaller groups in this country.

Stravinsky and Hindemith, as well as Ernst Krenek, Ernst Toch,

## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

and Darius Milhaud, are now living in America and are active as composers and teachers. Hindemith's *We Build a City* and Kurt Weill's *Der Ja-Sager* (The Yes-Man), as well as their compositions based on the Lindbergh flight, preceded Aaron Copland's *Second Hurricane* in the field of opera for high school students. Milhaud's *Le Pauvre Matelot*, Ibert's *Angelique* and *Le Roi d'Yvetot*, and Prokofiev's *Duenna* are among the chamber operas that have been performed in this country.

Most of these European works (and a long list of others that have not yet been performed in America) are short and would be welcome additions to the repertoire of American operatic groups, but many of them, unfortunately, were conceived still under the influence of the Wagnerian symphonic orchestration and are so heavily instrumented that few of the smaller groups could afford to perform them.

An example is Erich Wolfgang Korngold's one-act opera, *The Ring of Polycrates*, which the composer, who later lived in Hollywood as a composer of film music, wrote at the age of sixteen. It was given in Philadelphia under the direction of Alexander Smallens in 1927. Its orchestral score asks for sixteen wind instruments, ten percussion, a harp, a celesta, and a string quartet.

The same difficulty hampers the use of such masterworks as Ravel's *L'Heure Espagnole*, Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi*, Busoni's *Arlecchino*, Bartók's *Duke Bluebeard's Castle*, Malipiero's *Il Finto Arlecchino*, De Falla's *La Vida Breve*, the operas of Wolf-Ferrari, and many others.

The most recent European composer whose operas are appearing at an increasing rate in the repertoire of progressive American opera groups is Benjamin Britten. His first opera, *Paul Bunyan*, conceived as an American ballad opera, was produced by Columbia University in 1941. If my recollection of the performance is correct (no printed score exists), in spite of its not quite perfected form, this work showed unmistakably the talent of the young composer.

The story was chosen by W. H. Auden, one of the best known young English poets, because, he said, "America is unique in being the only country to create myths after the occurrence of the industrial revolution. Because it was an undeveloped continent with an open frontier and a savage climate, conditions favorable to myth-making still existed. . . . The principal interest of the Bunyan legend today is as a reflection of the cultural problems that occur during the first stage

## ON BROADWAY

of every civilization, the stage of colonization of the land and the conquest of nature. The operetta, therefore, begins with a prologue in which America is still a virgin forest and Paul Bunyan has not yet been born, and ends with a Christmas party at which he bids farewell to his men because now he is no longer needed. External physical nature has been mastered, and for this very reason can no longer dictate to men what they should do."<sup>11</sup>

Since Paul Bunyan's supernatural appearance and power excluded the possibility of believable visual production, he was only heard, and that, in contrast to the human characters of the play, as a speaking voice. And since the performance of his deeds would have required elaborate staging, these were presented in narrative ballads sung between the scenes.

Britten's next opera, *Peter Grimes*, was an international success. Originally commissioned by Koussevitzky for the Berkshire Music Center, it was first performed at Sadler's Wells in London in 1945 and quickly established itself as one of the most successful new operas in the leading opera houses in Europe. It had its American première at Tanglewood during the summer of 1946 and was presented at the Metropolitan in 1948.

The libretto for *Peter Grimes* was derived from "The Borough," a poem by George Crabbe, which depicts various characters in a Suffolk fishing village on England's east coast about 1830. Among them is the fisherman Peter Grimes, who, under suspicion of having killed two apprentice boys, is driven to insanity by the hostility of his fellow townspeople.

For *Peter Grimes* Britten used the apparatus of grand opera, but his two succeeding works, a tragedy, *The Rape of Lucretia*, and a comic opera, *Albert Herring* (both performed first at Glyndebourne, in 1946 and 1947 respectively), are chamber operas employing small casts and orchestras of only thirteen players.

*The Rape of Lucretia* gives modern treatment to the ancient story that took place in Rome in 500 B.C. A soprano and a tenor, seated on thrones at opposite sides of the stage, comment on the action in the manner of a chorus. The opera had its first American performance in Chicago in 1947 and was given a short run, staged by Agnes de Mille, at the Ziegfeld Theatre in New York the following year.

In *Albert Herring*, based on Maupassant's short story "Le Rosier



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

de Madame Husson," the action was transferred from France to a typically English country town by Eric Crozier, Britten's producer and friend. It was first performed in America at Tanglewood during the summer of 1949.

Recently Britten has written a new version of *The Beggar's Opera*, using an orchestra of twelve players, and has added to the repertoire of children's operas a piece called *Let's Make an Opera: An Entertainment for Young People*. Crozier adapted this libretto from Blake's poem "The Chimney Sweep." The cast consists of eight children, ranging in age from seven to fifteen, and five adults, with an orchestra of six players: a string quartet, piano, and percussion.

The opera is written in two parts, which are done in one set. In Part I the children write and rehearse their own opera, "The Little Sweep," which recounts the story of an apprentice chimney sweep. Part II is the performance, in which the audience, rehearsed by the children, takes an active part, singing interludes between the scenes. The opera ends with cast and audience joining in a final chorus.

A modern approach and an economical apparatus make all these works by Britten, except the more demanding *Peter Grimes*, practical for performance by smaller opera companies and schools.

Surely this survey offers convincing proof that opera is much more alive and contemporary in America than is commonly thought. And interestingly enough, in these modern works, whether by European composers or by Americans, a uniform, rationalistic pattern in artistic aims and production methods reveals itself:

1. The plots are mostly chosen from subjects familiar to the present-day audience and the performances are given in their own language. Opera is stepping down from the castles of the gods to the homes of the people.

2. The musical treatment is returning from the symphonic form of the Wagnerian grand opera to the simpler forms of the folk operas of the Age of Reason which alternated spoken dialogue with musical "numbers." The demands on vocal quantity and orchestral size are being reduced proportionately.

3. The scenic production follows the style of musical theater, which results in naturalness of dramatic ensemble, acting, and scenery.

## ON BROADWAY

But we have been approaching the subject from one side only, and the gap between opera and the people, which was nowhere wider than in America, has been closing from two sides: opera has been moving toward Broadway and Broadway has been moving toward opera.

Actually, in the first direction, the one we have been considering, the process has been slower, because composers and librettists schooled in the lore and conventions of traditional opera have not too readily adjusted to the demands of the realistic American mind. Among the works that can be classified as full-fledged operas only *Porgy and Bess*, *Street Scene*, *The Medium*, and *The Consul* have had real success as measured in terms of the usual Broadway runs.

But in the other direction, the musical theater has adopted operatic forms with spectacular success. Oscar Hammerstein II, for one, seems to have found a practical formula for infusing into American musical drama just as much of opera as Broadway audiences would accept, and no more.

In the "musical play" *Show Boat* (first performed, in a production by Florenz Ziegfeld, at the Ziegfeld Theatre in New York in 1927) Hammerstein and the composer Jerome Kern created a real American folk opera. It followed Edna Ferber's story of life on the Mississippi during the nearly fifty years of Captain Andy's troupe on the *Cotton Blossom*, beginning in the late 1880s. According to Sigmund Spaeth, "It has been said that *Show Boat* is America's best opera, grand or otherwise. Certainly it is the most completely American in spirit and perhaps the most effective combination of the popular and the serious in our stage music."<sup>12</sup>

Hammerstein and the composer Richard Rodgers have done a series of "musical plays" which are stylistically close to the German *Singspiel* of Lortzing and Weber and to the French *opéra comique* of Auber. Like those European works, *Oklahoma!* (1943), *Carousel* (1945), *Allegro* (1947), and *South Pacific* (1949) use dialogue or melodramatic speech as their basis and apply musical forms, ranging from simple songs to more elaborate ensembles, according to the emotional and dramatic impact of each scene.

Whether by adapting plays from American folk experience as in *Oklahoma!* and *South Pacific*, by transplanting the plot to this country as in *Carousel*, or by writing his own modern story as in *Allegro*,

## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

Hammerstein brings the libretto's content close to the life and emotions of its audience.

*Oklahoma!*, based on *Green Grow the Lilacs* by Lynn Riggs, takes place among the cowboys and farmers in the former Indian Territory after the turn of the century. *South Pacific*, adapted by Hammerstein and Joshua Logan from James A. Michener's *Tales of the South Pacific*, deals with the most recent wartime experiences of American soldiers. *Carousel* moved Molnar's *Liliom* into the familiar surroundings of the New England coast. *Allegro*, telling the story of thirty-five years in an American's life from 1905 to 1940, deals with the conflict between country and city, between truth and hypocrisy in society.

By keeping their hearts and minds on the solid ground of highly practical Broadway in their production methods, Hammerstein and Rodgers have achieved phenomenal success. Up to the end of the 1948-49 season, according to the Theatre Guild, *Oklahoma!* had had 2246 performances in New York alone, *Carousel* 881, and *Allegro* 315, and *South Pacific* was taking a no less golden route.

If opera is to enter the American scene "through the back door of Broadway," as Hammerstein thought, he and Rodgers have done a great deal toward getting it through the portals. But they have taken care to be sure nobody would notice that precisely this was happening.

# *Community* OPERA

IN 1936 I returned with my family from Europe to America to begin my first engagement with the Metropolitan Opera Company. On board the *Normandie* we moved slowly up the Hudson River toward the pier, looking at the always fascinating New York skyline. We were being interviewed by newspaper reporters, and my boy, then three years old, was eager to demonstrate his knowledge of the New World. Pointing to Manhattan on the right, he explained, "This is New York," then turning to New Jersey on the left, "and this is 'America!'"

The newspapermen agreed laughingly with this distinction, but it took me many years to find out for myself that some truth lay behind the child's remark, with regard also to the production of opera.

In New York an indigenous form of opera can establish itself successfully only on Broadway, and there the productions have to fit within the commercial run-of-the-play formula, which means the performance of one play by an organization set up in most cases for this particular purpose. It is sponsored by a group of earthly "angels" who expect lucrative returns for their backing, which is given on terms



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

neither much different nor necessarily safer than their other financial investments.

But beyond the Hudson, in America proper, there may be found new and very different ways of producing opera, less profitable ways perhaps, and less glamorous, but corresponding to the other side of the American nature: simple, generous, and unselfish. In comparison with the slick businesslike perfection of a Broadway "musical," these ways may often look primitive and amateurish, but they are sincere and democratic and intensely gratifying.

Take, for example, Flint, Michigan. A community of 175,000 inhabitants, it has, every year since 1932, performed an opera right on its own main street.

The city's opera company is entirely a civic project, being sponsored by the Flint Community Music Association, whose officers and budget are paid by the Community Chest Fund and the board of education. Its "executive organizer" acts as head of the instrumental music department in the public schools and also as conductor of the Flint Symphony Orchestra and the Flint Choral Union, both civic amateur groups. The Community Chest allots no direct financial contribution to the civic opera, but the Community Music Association makes available the services of its paid staff. The organizer and his assistant act as chorus master and conductors, and the office secretary takes care of correspondence, ticket distribution, and other details. Committees of local businessmen, musical groups, and public school faculties cooperate with the opera company, as does the chamber of commerce, which pays for the printing of the programs and presents the performances.

The mayor usually endorses the enterprise with an announcement, and for the presentation of *Carmen* in 1948 he issued a "Proclamation" declaring the week of the performance as Flint Civic Opera Week, "so that the people of Flint may show appreciation for the fact that our city has been recognized throughout the Nation as the outstanding leader and pioneer in the movement to establish completely civic opera in our own language in the cities of the United States."

This civic opera company came into existence during the 1920s shortly after the arrival in Flint of a young tenor, Fred L. McKittrick. After hesitating for some time between a vocal career and a railroad job in Flint, he finally decided to stay on the safer track of business—

## IN THE COMMUNITY

a "wise decision," he calls it now. But he did not give up his interest in singing. He convinced the Community Music Association and its head, William W. Norton, that the components for opera in Flint were already in existence: the Flint Choral Union, the Flint Symphony Orchestra, and the Flint Opera Society.

The opera society had been founded by Mrs. Emily G. Hixson, an accompanist, for the purpose of presenting "the intimate performance of parts or scenes from opera . . . with piano accompaniment. All the members were interested in singing important parts, so naturally there was no chorus. The limitations of this arrangement were soon reached."

By combining the choral union and the symphony orchestra with the opera society's group of principals, Flint's Civic Opera soon became a fact, and in 1932 a double bill of Cadman's opera *Shanewis* and *Cavalleria Rusticana* was produced in the Central High School auditorium on two successive nights by different casts of principals. Fred L. McKittrick became the general manager, stage director, and leading tenor of the Civic Opera, Mr. Norton its conductor, and Mrs. Hixson its coach-accompanist.

The language question, so troublesome for American grand opera companies, was no problem for such a truly civic company, for "with so many soloists taking part, many of whom had never studied foreign languages, and with all the people in the choruses likewise unfamiliar with Italian and French, there was no controversy whatever about the text. Everybody realized it would all have to be done in English or not at all."

So the translations appearing in the printed vocal scores were used. If certain phrases or words did not seem right, they were changed. The producing director had no doubts about this method: "Any intelligent singer should be able to do this with no trouble at all. There is too much stress on this mythical obstacle to opera in English. Even a bad translation is better than the folly of opera in a language not understood by the audience or the people who are trying to sing it."

The same healthy common sense was applied at other points of the artistic policy. Said the director, "To be eligible to use the designation *Civic Opera* it is felt here that the organization must produce entire operas, not shortened versions or excerpts, one or more times per year, with full opera orchestra, chorus, and ballet when called for, and using only local people, not imported casts or conductors."

## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

The Flint Civic Opera's repertoire consists of the popular operas plus Cadman's *Shanewis* and Randall Thompson's contemporary opera *Solomon and Balkis*. Since 1946 the performances have been given in Flint's Industrial Mutual Association auditorium, which seats more than 5000. About this the director comments:

"The ideal auditorium for the Flint Civic Opera would seat only 2500 and would have a large balcony over most of the rear half of the main floor seats, so that all outlying seats would be only half as far from the stage. A Civic Memorial Auditorium has already been planned on Flint Civic Opera specifications as a part of the new Civic Center. It will contain, among many desirable conveniences and improvements, soundproof rehearsal rooms ranging in size from an ordinary studio to one large enough to accommodate orchestra, chorus, and cast in action rehearsals. It will have a large storage space under the stage for scenery, properties, and costumes, with a large elevator to the stage, plenty of dressing rooms, and an orchestra pit large enough for 100 musicians so that oratorio performances can have a proper balance.

"The operas were given two to four nights in the past, but at present, because of the use of the excessively large auditorium, one or at most two performances are all that is practical from a box-office standpoint. Cities of 175,000 people are not ready to supply audiences of 2500 for opera more than one or two times a year. When we used auditoriums of 900 and 1400 capacity, we could get good audiences for four nights in a spread of two weeks, but smaller stages prevent good opera staging, so for the past three years we have sacrificed in number of performances in order to produce spectacular performances in a truly grand way, using 70 to 80 in the chorus and the largest scenery available."

Scenery and costumes are mostly rented from the Stivanello-Culcasi Theatrical Costume Company in New York; others, formerly the property of the Detroit Civic Opera, are now owned by the Flint company. "For example," the general director explains, "we need to import no scenery for the complete *Traviata*, but have no costumes except those for the matadors and picadors. Likewise, we have what we need for the third and fourth acts of *Carmen* but require imported costumes and drops for the first two acts. We can produce *Martha*

## IN THE COMMUNITY

with no outside costumes or scenery. We have all the necessary scenery for *Lucia* but no costumes.

"For solid set pieces we have a professional scenery painter of exceptional ability available through the stage men. Known only as 'Scotty' and now managing a theater in a small nearby town, he will take Mr. McKitrick's rough sketch of Delilah's house, Dagon's temple, Abimelech's Palace, the Carmen guardhouse and tobacco factory, or the tombs of the Ravenswoods and paint them with an uncanny understanding of what is wanted."

Rehearsals are sufficient in number. "On an average, we have approximately twelve preliminary chorus rehearsals, two hours long, and as many preliminary principal cast rehearsals with piano, followed by twelve or fourteen stage rehearsals, eight of which are with orchestra. However, not all of the opera can be rehearsed in each of these periods, so actually the opera is not fully rehearsed more than half the total, or about thirteen or fourteen times—except in the case of the principals, who regularly stay for one hour or more after each stage rehearsal and also devote about ten additional Saturday afternoon rehearsals of two to three hours each to both music and action. Some principals put in much work at home, some less, and some practically none. Some have to be taught everything. Only one full dress rehearsal with lights and scenery is had, two days before the performance."

Only accompanists, stagehands, advertising, and the rent of the theater, scenery, and costumes are paid for. This means a budget amounting to less than \$3000, which is, at a two-dollar top price, balanced by the box-office returns. The opera manager draws his conclusions with understandable pride:

"If opera ever was produced for the sake of opera alone, Flint can be cited as one city entitled to that distinction. Nobody in it can reap a financial profit, but spiritual profits, experience, and personal satisfaction are unlimited and entirely dependent upon how much a person gives of himself to it. In our seventeen years, ninety-five different people have been given the opportunity to sing principal roles one or more times; several hundred people have sung in the choruses, played in the orchestra, acted as supers, or danced in the ballet, while thousands have heard and seen, mostly for the first time, the great popular operas authentically staged and sung in the language they understand.



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

It can be safely said that almost none of the people in each of these categories would have had a single experience of any similarity at any time, had the Flint Civic Opera never existed."

And Mr. McKittrick adds, "Substantially the same conditions exist in all medium-sized cities or even less populated areas. The inferences are obvious."

Flint is by no means alone in this development. In St. Paul, Minnesota, for instance, a Civic Opera Association was formed in 1933. Pointing to the artistic prestige its sister city Minneapolis had gained from its symphony orchestra, the original announcement of the new civic opera said, "St. Paul, as a self-respecting music center, needs good opera fully as much as it needs good symphony music." Since then St. Paul has had one of the oldest civic opera companies in the country, which produces three different operas annually, mixing grand opera with light in its repertoire. Its musical director is Leo Kopp and its stage director Phil Fein.

Not enjoying official civic support like the Flint company, the St. Paul association has nonetheless proved to be a good citizen of its community. Up to 1948 it had given 145 performances of 28 operas and 18 operettas at a \$2.75 top price, employing more than 1700 in the chorus and 750 as principals. Its audiences include not only the music-loving public of the Twin Cities, but also people coming from nearby towns. With the help of public-spirited citizens and businessmen, the organization has also presented free matinees for school children. The distribution of its tickets has been handled through the recreation committee of the Community Chest and the Neighborhood House.

In 1944 these operatic activities in St. Paul were supplemented by the foundation of an operatic workshop for the purpose of training young singers.

Still older is the Municipal Opera Company of Allentown, Pennsylvania. Founded in 1928, its purposes, according to its by-laws, are: "(a) To give musical recreation to the people of the community by offering them an opportunity to sing the best of musical works. (b) To present the best of Light Opera, dramatized Oratorio, Grand Opera, and the choice works of Musical Comedy. (c) To give soloists a chance to participate in the finest musical performances available and afford

## IN THE COMMUNITY

opportunity for bringing some of the outstanding singers of Opera and Musical Comedy to our city."

The company's charter requires that its board of directors include "a representative of the soprano, alto, tenor, and bass sections of the chorus and that . . . in addition to a \$10 initiation fee, all its members, after their first production, sell a minimum of \$10 net worth of tickets for each production." Membership in an assisting organization named the Municipal Opera Associates, with annual dues of ten dollars, is open to those who wish to help backstage.

The company produces two operas a year, mostly light operas, each given three performances at a one-dollar top price. With only the director, orchestra, and the rent for the theater, scenery, and costumes to be paid for, the yearly budget of \$10,000 is balanced by the ticket sales. An imposing number of sponsors, all listed in the program, ensures the attendance.

Similar, although on a still more modest budget, is the setup of the Civic Opera Society in nearby Reading, Pennsylvania. Affiliated with the local Harmonie Maennerchor, it has been devoted since 1936 to the promotion of local talent. Under its musical director Fred Cardin, three performances are given annually, all in English. No salaries are paid to the soloists.

This pattern of civic opera companies working with small financial means but with a great deal of unselfish enthusiasm repeated itself in several places throughout the country during the years before World War II. For instance, at the famous Mission Inn in California, the Riverside Opera Association started in 1932 to devote its efforts to the promotion of opera in the vernacular. In Omaha, Nebraska, an Association of Opera in English was founded in 1927, and Madame Thea Moeller-Hermes produced operas and excerpts for its members, whose annual dues of five dollars entitled them to admission to all performances. The Florentine Opera Company was organized in 1934 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, for the purpose of providing opportunities for local talent. It was sponsored by the department of municipal recreation of the Milwaukee public school system and supported from the public school fund.

In other cities the initiative in organizing local opera companies was taken by music schools anxious to create outlets where their students

## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

could gain practical stage experience. Sometimes these endeavors developed into professional opera companies.

The first and one of the most important ventures of this kind was the American Opera Company, which originated in the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York, in 1924. Its director, Vladimir Rosing, has given me this account of its history:

"In June 1923 I was invited by Mr. Eastman to form the opera department of the Eastman School of Music with the object of developing young American singers and to form from them the American Opera Company. It was to be a national organization composed of only American singers singing in English, and in its productions acting was to be as important as singing. Twenty singers were chosen by auditions in Chicago, Boston, and New York. They were given \$1000 a year and free tuition at the Eastman School. On the musical staff we had Albert Coates and Eugene Goossens, and for my dramatic department I brought from England a young Russian refugee, Rouben Mamoulian, to assist me in the dramatic training of the singers. In 1924 the Rochester American Opera Company was formed and began giving performances in and around Rochester. In April 1927 the Theatre Guild presented us to New York under its auspices. Success was outstanding with the press and the public. A national committee was then formed, headed by Mr. and Mrs. William Carrington, to take over the Rochester American Opera Company and make it a national institution. The board of directors included Mrs. Christian Holmes, Mrs. Rockefeller McCormick, Mrs. Stanley McCormick, who generously financed the company for Chicago seasons, Otto Kahn, and many other prominent people.

"The American Opera Company, as such, made its auspicious debut in Washington in December 1927 before President Coolidge. The movement of establishing a national opera was on the way. The company was making a success in every city it played. It stirred the music world. It made friends; it made enemies. It created controversy. But it made great artistic strides. With Frank St. Leger as musical director and Robert Edmond Jones as designer of some of our productions, the company toured for three years in all the principal cities of the South, North, and Middle West. The receipts were increasing with every season and the company almost began to pay for itself. Then came the crash of 1929. In spite of the fact that President Herbert

## IN THE COMMUNITY

Hoover in a letter addressed to the Speaker of the House endorsed the American Opera Company and asked all music lovers to support it, we were forced to abandon our season of 1930-31 because the depression was increasing."

Nevertheless, the artistic ideas of the American Opera Company lived on, and we shall see them bear fruit in many subsequent enterprises.

Since 1929 the Chautauqua Opera Association, founded by Albert Stoessel, has been producing two performances of six different operas in English every year during a six weeks' summer season. It is sponsored by the Chautauqua Institution and was originally assisted by the Juilliard School of Music in New York. Under the direction of Alfredo Valenti it had by 1948 produced forty-three operas and sixteen light operas in 220 performances. It has provided an unusual opportunity for young operatic artists and has shown the most consistent record of any opera organization performing in the vernacular.

With the beginning of World War II, the number of local opera companies increased throughout the country, partly because of the growing interest in music, but also because of the curtailment of musical relationships with Europe. At the same time that the major opera companies, cut off from new European imports, began offering greater opportunities to American singers, it became impossible for young artists to cross the Atlantic for training and experience. This situation made the need for more operatic outlets in America acute, and a great number of new small operatic companies began a courageous fight for artistic ideals in the face of the old enemy of good opera—inadequate finances. Also, several of the bigger cities began to develop more ambitious operatic organizations.

In Pittsburgh, whose industrial importance increased at the start of World War II, the Pittsburgh Opera, Inc., was formed in 1939 and soon, under the leadership of Richard Karp, became a truly professional company. In the Syria Mosque Theatre it has produced two performances each of five to seven operas every season.

Although the director first aimed at opera in English, he met with difficulties that forced him to surrender to tradition. He explains: "Since audiences could not be induced to attend performances with unknown singers and to listen to opera in English, we had the alterna-



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

tive of giving up or compromising. The latter seemed to be the lesser evil." So the performances in Pittsburgh are, with a few exceptions, sung in the opera's original language.

The leading singers and stage directors are imported from New York, but the ballet master, dancers, chorus, and orchestra are local talent. With guarantors who contribute up to fifty dollars each and with the assistance of an enthusiastic Women's Auxiliary Committee, the annual budget of about \$100,000 is being balanced.

One of the singing members of the Rochester American Opera Company was George F. Houston. After appearing in several Broadway musicals and in Hollywood roles, he was persuaded in 1940 to direct a production in English of *The Magic Flute* at the City College in Los Angeles. From this effort grew the American Music Theatre, Inc., of Pasadena. Houston and conductor Richard Lert performed several operas in English in Pasadena, Los Angeles, and all over the state of California, and some fine talent was developed in the process: John Raitt, later of *Oklahoma!* and *Carousel* fame, Brian Sullivan, Virginia Card, George London, and a number of others. Also, Mr. Houston made several English translations for the company's use. His untimely death cut short not only the career of a fine artist but also the existence of the American Music Theatre. Later, though, its principles and policies were carried on by Lert with William Wymetal Jr. as stage director, with whom he also presented several operas in English at the Hollywood Bowl.

Vladimir Rosing, too, went to Los Angeles at the outbreak of the war in Europe and in 1939, with Albert Coates, started the Southern California Opera Association, which was based on the principles of the American Opera Company. From this group a number of today's well-known artists developed, such as Nadine Connor, Nan Merriman, and Jerome Hines. America's entry into the war in 1941 ended this opera project in Los Angeles—an exception to the general trend.

In 1943, after a lapse of eighteen years, New Orleans, the historic center of French opera in America, proved that its operatic tradition was still alive. Walter Herbert, head of the New Orleans company, has wisely staggered his season from October to April or May, producing seven different operas, each given twice at intervals of two or four weeks. This system not only allows sufficient time for the preparation of each opera; it also enables music lovers to see every production,

## IN THE COMMUNITY

which they can scarcely do if all the operas are compressed into a short period.

The New Orleans company has imported its singers and directors but it entrusts small parts to local performers, who also sing in the chorus and act as understudies for the leads, thus gaining valuable experience in preliminary rehearsals. One summer, cooperation with a local radio station resulted in weekly broadcasts of "Auditions of the Air," which gave young singers an opportunity to be heard and considered for these smaller parts. The chorus rehearses the operas without pay during the three months preceding the season, but during the season everyone is paid on a union contract basis. Scenery is mostly made new; costumes are rented. The operas are usually sung in foreign languages, but sometimes in English translations.

New Orleans supports its opera. A total budget of \$120,000 for the 1948-49 season, which was given at the Municipal Auditorium (seating 2500 people) at a seven-dollar top price, was balanced by the income from the subscription sale (25 per cent), single ticket sales (50 per cent), and contributions (25 per cent). During the 1949-50 season the subscription sale rose to 46 per cent of the total. To handle contributions an Opera Fund has been established and all donors to it are listed in the programs.

A very active Women's Guild lends additional assistance by promoting the sale of season tickets and social fund-raising activities, and also by educational work in the city schools and by bringing opera to hospitals. Recordings of selections from *Carmen*, for instance, were sent during one school year to all high and elementary schools in the city. In the high schools prizes of five free tickets to a performance of *Carmen* with Swarthout in March 1949 were given for the best essay on the subject, "Opera, a Combination of all the Arts." And in the elementary schools prizes were awarded to those schools whose pupils built the best miniature sets for *Carmen*, with dolls dressed as characters in the opera.

All in all, the New Orleans Opera Association has made a well-balanced effort to give the city its own civic opera. And the city government has taken the lead among American communities by contributing a subsidy of from \$4000 to \$8000 yearly to the Opera Association—although, unhappily, it takes this back again in the form of ticket taxes.

## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

At almost the same time as New Orleans, New York City took an important step toward establishing a civic opera. In the preceding years two attempts to establish modernized opera on a permanent basis in that city had failed. One was the short-lived American Lyric Theatre, which during the spring of 1939 produced, among other works, the première of Douglas Moore's *The Devil and Daniel Webster* under the direction of Fritz Reiner, John Houseman, and Robert Edmond Jones.

The other attempt was the New Opera Company, founded by Mrs. Lytle Hull and Yolanda Mero-Irion, president and executive director of the Musicians' Emergency Fund. It opened in 1941 with productions of *Così fan tutte* and Verdi's *Macbeth* under Fritz Busch, who had previously conducted both operas at Glyndebourne, England. During its second season it launched a new wave of "musicals" on Broadway with a very successful performance of *Rosalinda*, Max Reinhardt's and Erich Korngold's version of Johann Strauss's *Die Fledermaus*. With this "hit" the company began to turn away from grand opera to light, and two seasons later it went out of existence.

Then in 1943, under Mayor Fiorello La Guardia and Newbold Morris, president of the city council, the New York City Center of Music and Drama, Inc., was founded on a basis that combined democratic ideals with very practical business sense.

During the 1930s the city had become owner of the building of the bankrupt Mecca Temple but could find no bidders to pay the taxes. Taking over this building, the new City Center organization, underwritten with some \$90,000 guaranteed by public-minded individuals, foundations, and labor unions, paid the municipal taxes in place of rent. The organization drew its revenues from a variety of year-round activities; in addition to operas and concerts, there were productions of ballet and musical comedies and the renting of the theater as well as office space in the building. With such "extra" resources amounting to about \$70,000 during the fiscal year of 1948, the corporation was able that year to pay a deficit of more than \$15,000 incurred by its opera branch, the New York City Opera Company, and one of almost twice that size for the New York City Symphony, which was dropped the following season. Thus, according to the 1948 financial report, the City Center of Music and Drama was not only self-sustaining but had

## IN THE COMMUNITY

a small operating profit, even after paying the city a rental equal to the yearly taxes.

Relying in fact, therefore, more on the good will of its civic-minded officers—Newbold Morris became chairman of the board of directors, while Morton Baum took over the chairmanship of the executive committee—than on financial sacrifice by the City of New York, the new opera company made its debut with a performance of *Tosca* on February 21, 1944, under the leadership of Laszlo Halasz.

The production expenses of the young company had to be kept low, and Halasz did a clever job of navigating between the Scylla of severe budget limitations and the Charybdis of seldom heard operas, new singers, modern production methods, and costly rehearsals. In view of the circumstances, the progress of the City Center Opera has been remarkable.

In six years, with a fall and a spring season each, the company's repertoire grew from three operas, with borrowed sets and costumes, to twenty-nine newly studied productions, well balanced between the popular standard works and less familiar new ones. Among the latter were staged Richard Strauss's *Ariadne auf Naxos* (the New York première, except for a student performance at Juilliard), *Pelléas*, *Eugen Onegin*, *Werther*, Puccini's *Manon Lescaut* and *Turandot*, Prokofiev's *Love for Three Oranges*, three of Menotti's operas staged by the composer, the world première of *Troubled Island* by the Negro composer William Grant Still, and some modern productions by Theodore Komisarjevsky, Leopold Sachse, and others.

The company has expanded its operations constantly, from 24 performances of seven operas during the 1943-44 season to 74 performances of eighteen operas in 1948-49. During this latter season the number of performances was brought to a total of 92 by a guest season at the Chicago Civic Opera House, which solidly established the organization's rating as second among the major opera companies in the country.

The City Center Opera has employed modern choreographers, given numerous young American singers a much needed opportunity, and made some attempts to produce opera in English (for instance, the first performance of the new translation of *The Marriage of Figaro* by Ruth and Thomas Martin). Giving its performances at a three-



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

dollar top price (in comparison with a \$7.50 top at the Metropolitan), it has brought opera within the reach of thousands of new listeners and given encouragement to similar endeavors throughout the country.

The first guest season of the City Center Opera in Chicago, in December 1948, was undertaken at the invitation of a committee of Chicago citizens, headed by the mayor, and the Chicago Music Foundation. The purpose of the venture was to establish in Chicago a similar civic opera organization which would "work out a cooperative arrangement with New York, for common artistic and business direction, and for common policies, so that Chicago and New York together may have a six-months continuous season."<sup>1</sup>

Claudia Cassidy analyzed the implications of the new project in the *Chicago Sunday Tribune*:

"Most of us, when we talk about opera, cross our fingers, knock on wood and look for the new moon over our left shoulder. It's a touchy subject, especially in Chicago, and there was some wry laughter when Bill Leonard discovered that the recent luncheon held to announce the engagement of the New York City Opera Company was taking place beneath an imposing painting of Chicago in ruins after the fire. But though the bricks may still be hot, the Chicago Opera Company has cleaned up its debris. Nothing as spectacular as the great days is in prospect, but if we step warily, we still may build on a not quite uprooted foundation. . . . Considering that Chicago Opera in its time has achieved and paid off annual deficits in excess of \$1,000,000—and pampered listeners in a style to which they would like to become reaccustomed—it may seem difficult to believe the New York group has been able to do anything worth seeing on a budget of \$8,000 per opera. But it seems to have done just that at popular prices."<sup>2</sup>

Although the first season did not enjoy full houses, the deficit of \$7000 was reasonably modest and was covered from the \$30,000 available through the Chicago Music Foundation. A new three-year plan then agreed upon by the two civic groups was described by Claudia Cassidy:

"For the season of 1949 at least half the chorus and orchestra and all the ballet will be recruited and trained in Chicago well ahead of the season. The costs of these Chicago groups and local administration will be defrayed by Chicago's \$23,000 [the \$30,000 from the Chicago Music Foundation minus the \$7000 needed to cover the preceding

## IN THE COMMUNITY

season's deficit]. The chorus will be trained by Thomas P. Martin (of the New York City Opera), the ballet by a ballet master said to be distinguished but not yet named. The orchestra, which hopes to take in some of the town's younger players, will be trained by the conductors of the New York company, who will conduct the operas presented. The seasons of 1950 and 1951 will be extended and local participation increased. It is hoped to find additional funds for scholarships and to plan for new productions.

"During the Chicago season in 1949 the New York Company will present one performance a week in Milwaukee. Fully guaranteed requests have been made by so many other midwestern cities, it is hoped a Chicago unit established by 1952 could profitably extend its season by touring. The companies would share soloists and general artistic staff under the direction of Mr. Halasz, with the local group seeking a resident executive assistant and a resident publicity director, each on a year-around basis."<sup>3</sup>

I am not convinced of the soundness of this method of organizing a community opera, but at least it is an effort to give Chicago a new civic opera, very different though it may be from the lush grand opera of the city's predepression days. Difficulties over interpretation of the terms of the agreement as to the proportion of the personnel to be provided by Chicago were serious enough in 1950 to cause a temporary cancellation of the season, but Messrs. Petrillo and Baum finally reached a settlement and the program was carried out. Plans for a three weeks' Chicago season in 1950 included two side trips to Milwaukee and other guest performances in Kansas City, Detroit, and East Lansing.

In some cities the wartime trend produced new opera companies that functioned in imitation of the old manner, without sufficient means—for example, the "grand opera companies" that came into being in Boston, Trenton, Newark, Hartford, New Haven, Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., Rochester, Syracuse, Detroit, Denver, and on to the Pacific Coast. In other cities the projects were new and simpler in methods and aimed at the development of an indigenous civic opera. Even though some of these ventures were short-lived, they were not in vain; they each added a bit to the development of an American type of opera.

## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

In Philadelphia, for instance, the tradition of "Opera in English by Philadelphians" lived on through many organizations such as the Civic Opera Company (1923-1927), the 1934-35 opera season of the Philadelphia Orchestra Association, and the Philadelphia Opera Company.

This last-named company, beginning in 1939, with Sylvan Levin as musical director and John Wolmut as stage director, produced several remarkable performances, among them *Der Rosenkavalier* (with a tenor singing the role of Octavian) and *Pelléas* in English, the first stage performance of Deems Taylor's *Ramuntcho*, and others. In 1945 the company disbanded, only to be revived after the war in the form of another American Opera Company.

Similar companies were founded all over the country. In 1939, in Canton, Ohio, Alberto Bimboni started a Civic Opera Association with eighty local singers, a resident stage director, and scenery and costumes locally designed and executed. Miami, Florida, in 1944 founded an Opera Guild affiliated with the University of Miami and sponsored by the city commission, which contributed a modest sum, and the county, which donated the use of a theater. Two operas were given there each season, with three or four performances each; one in the original language, the other in English. Productions in condensed form, employing local singers, were given for school children. Santa Monica, California, organized its Civic Opera Association in 1944, and under Mario Lanza gave one opera every three months, using only local artists.

Across the border in Montreal, Canada, in 1936, Madame Athanase David, with the help of the native Wilfred Pelletier, originated the Montreal Festivals, an organization that first presented concerts. In 1940 they began producing operas, importing conductors and stage directors, designers, and the leading singers but engaging local artists for secondary parts, the orchestra, and the ballet. In 1946 the summer program of the Montreal Festivals was expanded to include large-scale productions of opera and in 1949 to add drama and ballet. All the musical and dramatic groups of Montreal, as well as the city administration and the local university, collaborate in this project, which seems to be the first major festival on the continent to embrace all forms of musical and theater arts.

In 1942 Pauline Donalda founded the Opera Guild of Montreal,

## IN THE COMMUNITY

attached to a local school of opera. Except for bringing in a few leading singers and directors, among them most notably Emil Cooper, formerly of the Metropolitan, it relies entirely on Canadian talent for its operatic performances.

The modest way in which such civic companies may start is shown by the story of the Chattanooga, Tennessee, Opera Association founded in 1943. It began with the arrival of two prominent musicians who had fled from Hitler's Germany: Dr. Werner Wolff, former director of the opera in Hamburg, and his wife, Emmy Land Wolff, a prominent Wagnerian soprano. Dr. Wolff answered my inquiries with the following account of the history of the Chattanooga civic opera:

"The idea of giving opera to the people of this area originated in the head of Mrs. Wolff. In 1939 we came as music teachers to Athens, Tennessee, where I was appointed head of the very small music department at Tennessee Wesleyan College and Mrs. Wolff started teaching voice. Her students in Athens had to give programs and to sing some songs in recitals. One day she told me she got bored with that type of work and suggested that we give an opera instead of a recital. Reluctantly and hesitatingly I complied with her wish.

"Well, the first opera we presented (in parts!) was the *Freischütz*. I was the coach and conductor and played the piano while directing the performance with my head, one hand, or some other part of my body. Since student singers who had never seen such a thing as opera were the performers, I was highly surprised by their natural talent. The college auditorium was crowded to capacity and everybody was enthusiastic.

"This event encouraged us to present *Il Trovatore* in the neighboring town of Chattanooga, where Mrs. Wolff had some pupils. The auditorium of the university was overflowing and we had to repeat the performance. Now we became 'daring' and gave *Carmen* as the next opera. To my great surprise, this difficult work, too, went over very well. After that success the civic leaders of Chattanooga established the Opera Association with American speed. Within ten days sponsors, donors, and guarantors made it possible to arrange for three performances a year.

"The two 'axioms' were (1) educational purposes, and (2) entertainment. No. 1 required a cast of local talent only, but this principle has had to be neglected more and more since there are not always



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

people in town who could take the lead. In such cases we have resorted to young talents from New York or other places, just people who come for their expenses with the idea of enjoying the experience and singing in a well-prepared performance. Local singers do not get any money. The long and thorough training we give them is more than a remuneration to them. They are conscious that they are contributing to a civic affair.

"There was no orchestra playing for the first two years. Then the board asked me to employ one. There was no organized orchestra in town, but for more than ten years there had been symphony concerts performed by amateurs, some professionals, and imported players under the direction of another man. They never had played anything like opera. You may imagine what it meant to train them for the new task, especially when it came to recitatives. Well, they are doing nicely by this time.

"The audience, too, needed training—i.e., to become 'opera-minded.' There are still quite a few people who say they don't like opera or are not interested in it. What people want here is to understand what is going on on the stage. Complying with their wishes, I have given all the operas in English. The translations often have been revised by myself and some friends. I don't think there is anything wrong with those English texts. If we could give Wagner it would be different. But we cannot.

"We have given the following operas: *Carmen*, *Cavalleria*, *Traviata*, *Trovatore*, *Pagliacci*, *Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Martha*, *Madame Butterfly*, *La Bohème*, *Hänsel and Gretel*, *Magic Flute*, *Marriage of Figaro*, and *Fledermaus*. *Figaro* was done remarkably well and had some true Mozart touches. Generally speaking, I might say that there is much talent and fine voice material to be found here in the South.

"P.S. I work as coach, chorus director, and conductor of the performance; Mrs. Wolff as electrician, prompter, stage-manager, curtain raiser, etc."

After World War II more and more civic opera companies were organized—partly, perhaps, because many American soldiers in Europe had come in contact with opera for the first time. Young conductors serving in the army were impressed not only by the fine opera they attended in Naples and Rome, but also by the high standard of the

## IN THE COMMUNITY

ensembles they found in the smaller European opera houses. An enthusiastic young soldier who was with the United States Army in Czechoslovakia wrote to me from Pilsen, a town of 100,000 inhabitants, in June 1945:

"Two evenings ago I saw in Pilsen one of the half-dozen best performances of opera that I have ever seen anywhere at any time. The opera was Smetana's *Dalibor*. With occasional lapses the singers were superb, the orchestra excellent, and the stage direction effective and purposeful. Perhaps the best single feature of the performance was the stage direction, which had a definite design; the action corresponded to the music, the principals fitted into the general scheme of things and their gestures were not restrainedly conventional, the chorus acted and grouped itself always with regard to the mass effect, the lighting heightened the dramatic effect, and the whole design of the action corresponded to the design of the music. Quite a contrast to the usual routine performances one sees. . . .

"The conductor told me that ordinarily all well-known operas and dozens of others are played in Pilsen—naturally all in Czech. He says the artists are very poorly paid and I suppose that is true, but, believe me, I should be glad to live in very modest circumstances if I had the opportunity of conducting such a group twice a week. There is no greater joy in life than purposeful creative work that is by abstract esthetic standards worth while and which renders a service to the community."

This soldier was a young American conductor from Philadelphia, Vernon Hammond, and after his return to his home town he went to work to live up to his ideals. In 1946 he organized the American Opera Company, which each season from then on has given three operas in English, in new productions and with young singers, at the Academy of Music. The annual expenses of about \$30,000 have been balanced by ticket sales and private contributions, in spite of the handicap of a 30 per cent admissions tax (20 per cent federal, 10 per cent municipal).

In Boston Boris Goldovsky, who had previously done similar work in and around Cleveland, founded in 1946 the New England Opera Theatre, as a kind of extension of his opera class at the New England Conservatory of Music. Since 1947 this company has given three or four operas each winter at the Opera House, scheduling them about one month apart. In addition to these performances in Boston, the

## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

Opera Theatre has an average of eight to ten bookings a year in nearby universities and colleges, where the operas are given mostly with piano accompaniment.

The organization started with a letter that Goldovsky sent, during the spring of 1946, to twenty-four wealthy Bostonians suggesting that they contribute to the founding of a local opera company. They did so, and with a board of directors made up of prominent citizens the company has raised about \$12,000 each year, from 350 to 400 donors giving from \$10 to \$1000 each.

The budget for four operas performed during the 1948-49 season was planned in the following way: A sell-out would bring in \$7000 from box-office receipts, and this amount would be sufficient to cover all production expenses except scenery and costumes, which were to be done new only if money was available; otherwise they were to be rented. Realistically the sum of \$1500 per opera, a total of \$6000, was budgeted to cover possible deficits. Adding an equal amount for scenery and costumes brought the total production cost into balance with the income from box-office receipts and the donors' fund.

Additional assistance has been provided by a New England Opera Theatre Guild. Its 1100 members, paying dues of three and five dollars per year, receive certain entertainments, such as lectures and special performances, and are also entitled to the privilege of securing tickets for the opera series one month ahead of the public sale—a procedure that guarantees to the company the sale of one third of the capacity seating. After recovering its expenses the guild donates its profits to the company.

The Opera Theatre has presented a well-prepared program, including a performance of *Carmen* in which, for the first time in America, the original score was restored on the basis of a microfilm of Bizet's manuscript.

Fort Worth, Texas, founded its Civic Opera Association in 1946. By 1949, the hundredth anniversary of the city, it was being assisted by five hundred private citizens and business firms with subscriptions ranging from \$25 to \$1000, and by an opera guild which received annual dues of five dollars from its six hundred members. During the fall and spring each season the Fort Worth company presents three operas in two performances each. For the 1948-49 season the sponsors con-

## IN THE COMMUNITY

tributed \$22,000 to make up the difference between a \$43,000 budget and the \$21,000 income from a capacity ticket sale.

The objectives of the organization were clearly stated at the beginning: "1. Presenting opera to Fort Worth in an absolutely professional manner. 2. Contributing to the cultural and civic life of Fort Worth. 3. Providing a professional laboratory wherein Texas musicians who can qualify will find an opportunity to gain a background of experience virtually unobtainable save for a few fortunate individuals."

After an encouraging beginning with Walter Herbert of New Orleans as guest musical director, plans were made for a further development in collaboration with Texas Christian University. In 1949 Karl Kritz, formerly with the Metropolitan and San Francisco opera companies, was engaged as permanent director and conductor of the Opera Association, and of a professional opera training school as well. Civic opera in Fort Worth seems solidly established.

What is considered to be Mississippi's "first performance of a complete grand opera with men and women singers in the state" was a performance of *Cavalleria Rusticana* in Jackson, Mississippi, in November 1945. It was sponsored by Belhaven College, a Presbyterian girls' school, and conducted by Harold V. Avery, head of the school's music department. Only college and townspeople took part in the performance. The following year, on the initiative of Marguerite C. Caldwell, the Jackson Opera Guild was formed, and it has since produced two performances of one opera annually.

The Guild is remarkable in that it has only active members, about two hundred, "who sing, play, and produce the operas, donating time and talent free (no dues) from prima donna to curtain puller and from orchestra member to auditor." Students from three nearby colleges take part in the productions, and the Guild sponsors an educational program in the schools. The public schools include opera in their regular classes, and Mrs. Caldwell talks to the students in all Jackson schools and colleges and many nearby schools before each opera. In turn, tax exemption is granted by both city and state.

Such ventures in opera on modern principles multiplied. In 1946 the Chicago Opera Theatre under Giovanni Cardelli was founded and made news with the American première of Britten's *The Rape of Lucretia*. In 1947 the St. Louis Grand Opera Guild began sponsoring an



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

opera workshop under Stanley Chapple which presented interesting programs of opera in English, including the first American performance of Vaughan Williams' *The Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains* and Menotti's *The Old Maid and the Thief*. Only guild members, at five dollars dues, were admitted to the performances, but the young singers enjoyed thirty weeks of free training for the three programs usually given during April.

At about the same time a progressive Music-Drama Guild was launched in Cincinnati to present new operas in its home town and on tour through small towns in Ohio, Kentucky, and Indiana, as well as to perform on television. Scranton, Pennsylvania, in 1946 started a Community Opera Society which uses mostly local talent for its productions, prepared in collaboration with the professional groups of the town.

A whole crop of operatic seeds in the form of clubs, small opera companies, and festivals has been sprouting in North Carolina, centering mostly around the activities of Clifford Bair of Winston-Salem and the National Association for Opera which he founded (see pages 184-85).

One of these grass-roots movements is the Music Theatre Repertory Group, "North Carolina's first professional touring company," as it calls itself proudly, which was organized by Amelia Cardwell in 1947. This group has produced one-act operas or abridged two-hour versions of *La Traviata* and *Hänsel and Gretel* in English to piano accompaniment, with simple scenery designed for easy transportation. For Menotti's *Old Maid and the Thief*, the director relates, "a folding set was devised which, when boxed, can be shipped for as little as five dollars within the state. When possible, we borrow a small truck and have one of the cast drive it to our destination, carrying scenery, etc. and bringing it back with us."

At times such traveling in the winter on icy roads has proved taxing, particularly when bookings at colleges or clubs in different towns were scheduled too close together, but the pioneer spirit of the young group has prevailed.

"Our success," Miss Cardwell states, "if measured in terms of actual cash, is negligible. Maybe one day we can charge a figure that will give us greater profit. But the enthusiastic bravos from recognized authorities in both North Carolina and other parts of the country, and respect

## IN THE COMMUNITY

from our colleagues for our accomplishments so far—these are intangible rewards which may one day lead to untold opportunities for us and others.”

The same movement toward a new form of operatic theater is very actively under way in the West. In 1946 a traveling chamber opera group, named the Intimate Opera Players, was organized by Jan Popper in Palo Alto, California. It was an offshoot of Stanford University's opera workshop, of which Popper was the musical director. With F. Cowles Strickland as stage director and Wendell Cole as designer, the group in 1947 gave twenty very successful performances of Mozart's *Così fan tutte* in English, with a two-piano accompaniment and very simple stylized sets, in the Las Palmas Theatre in Hollywood.

Mozart was featured also in Seattle, Washington, where Ernst Gebert's production of *The Marriage of Figaro* is still remembered, and where in 1946 Eugene Linden founded a Mozart Theatre. In Seattle, too, the Peroni Opera Guild, originally organized by Carolyn Tower as a training group for her voice pupils, led to the formation of the Little Opera House Company for her advanced students. Starting in 1948, this opera company has performed operas not only in Seattle, but also in neighboring towns and schools. The Peroni Opera Guild has given a scholarship to one opera aspirant in each community that has sponsored a performance by the Little Opera House Company.

A number of new operatic organizations have sprung up in and around Los Angeles. After the war Vladimir Rosing joined with Hugh Edwards, a captain in the army and a professional singer, to organize an opera school for veterans, which they named the American Operatic Laboratory. It started with a few singers in 1946 and by 1949 had more than four hundred on its roster. By that time the group had become another American Opera Company and was giving performances of opera in English.

Two others of the Los Angeles ventures are the Sunday Evening Opera under Sergei Radamsky, which presented the first local performances of Gluck's *Orfeo* in English, with Richard Hale singing the title role, and the Golden West Opera Company, a cooperative group of young singers who make their own scenery and costumes.

But the West Coast event of most significance occurred on October 19, 1948, when the Los Angeles County board of supervisors, in co-

## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

operation with the county Music Commission, authorized the Opera Guild of Southern California to organize a new opera company. The county's contract with this New Guild Opera Company, according to Cedric Hart, its manager, called for one performance in each of the five supervisorial districts of the county, for which the Music Commission was authorized to pay \$15,000 from its budget for the first season.

"A prime objective of the project," said Mr. Hart, "is to establish the interest and support of the average layman, who otherwise might not ever attend an opera. Also, special attention is being focused on teen-agers and the schools. Four of the five initial performances will be in high school auditoriums."<sup>4</sup>

The promoters of this civic project, among whom were musical pioneers of long standing, such as Mrs. Leiland Atherton Irish, Isabel Morse Jones, and William H. Richardson, pointed out its implications. Mr. Richardson, who became chairman of the New Guild Opera Company, had been the first to back the plan and bring the parties together. In his opinion opera until now "has been by-passed in our community sponsorship of music. As taxpayers, we have given huge sums to symphony, the Hollywood Bowl, and other splendid musical activities, but grand opera has not received any such appropriate donorship or sponsorship." He pointed out that opera is no longer merely a project for private enterprise but "is to be considered on the same basis as our schools, libraries, recreation grounds, and other civic attributes."

And Mrs. Irish, in her speech before the public session of the board of supervisors preceding the official vote on the project, declared, "The very nature of the plan will make it a greatly stimulating factor in the progress of all opera here. It will also help create more interest in opera by bringing the art directly to those in some regions who otherwise might not ever patronize it. The population of Los Angeles County is about 4,000,000 persons, most of whom live in less than half of its nearly 4000 square miles. Many of those people have never seen an opera. It is our mission to bring it to them, in English—and with our own fine talent, thus benefiting both our citizens and our young artists."<sup>5</sup>

The opera chosen for the new company's first season was *The Marriage of Figaro*. Sung in English, under Richard Lert as musical director and Glynn Ross as stage director, it was an outstanding success.

## IN THE COMMUNITY

During the summer of 1949 the company was incorporated and Carl Ebert was named its general director. The county board of supervisors granted \$25,000 for the 1949-50 season, and Ebert staged two operas, Mozart's *Abduction from the Seraglio* and Smetana's *Bartered Bride*. Wolfgang Martin, from the University of Southern California, and Jan Popper, from the University of California, conducted and Rolf Gerard and Harry Horner designed the productions.

Albert Goldberg of the *Los Angeles Times* found the results gratifying: "Above all, the ideal of unified ensemble and lucid, intelligent staging has been consistently maintained. The English translations have been good, the level of intelligible diction amazingly high. This type of performance is bound to advance the cause of opera in the vernacular—and if opera is to become a genuinely popular institution in this country, that is the answer."<sup>6</sup>

These nationwide endeavors to establish local companies are, as we have seen, frequently supported by opera guilds or clubs, which range in function from the actual production of operas to the less ambitious but highly important task of promoting public interest. Among guilds concerned with promotional and educational efforts, some, like those in Los Angeles and St. Louis, are affiliated with the Metropolitan Opera Guild by national membership, in addition to their work in support of their local companies. Others, like the Women's Guilds of Pittsburgh and Fort Worth and the New England Theatre Guild, serve solely the interests of their own civic opera companies.

Among the guilds that actually produce opera, besides those we have described at Jackson, Miami, Seattle, and Montreal, we may count at least the Washington, D.C., Opera Guild and the Chicago Concert and Opera Guild. There are also a number of "clubs" that produce operas—among them the Columbus, Ohio, Opera Club; the MacDowell Club of Milwaukee; the Tuesday Musical Club of Pittsburgh; the Euterpe Club of Greensboro, North Carolina; and the Detroit Friends of Opera, who during the 1944-45 season produced the American première of Dvorak's opera, *Rusalka*. In addition, there are listening groups that gather in libraries, schools, or private homes to study the Metropolitan broadcasts, and also "opera reading clubs," some of which have expanded their original listening and studying activities to the scenic presentation of operas in theaters.



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

One of the oldest of these last is the Euterpe Opera Reading Club of Los Angeles, which owes its origin to Mrs. Elmer Mansfield. While traveling with her husband in Europe, Mrs. Mansfield attended some opera performances and decided she wanted to understand the words. So, after her return to Los Angeles, she proposed the idea of an opera reading club to some friends and the group began meeting in a private home in 1924. Since then the membership of the Euterpe Opera Reading Club has grown to more than a thousand and their meetings are held at the Biltmore Theatre.

In the beginning the singers sang their parts from scores in concert form, to the accompaniment of two pianos. Today everything is being memorized and acted, with a dramatic coach to handle the stage direction. The operas are not performed in full but are reduced to excerpts lasting about an hour and a half.

Of more recent date is the Opera Reading Club of Hollywood, which under the conductor Adolph Heller has given several operas in English.

Some American symphony orchestras sponsor the production of opera on occasion. Artur Rodzinski, whose activity in opera during his tenure as conductor of the Cleveland Symphony Orchestra is not forgotten, made another try at opera in Chicago when he conducted *Tristan* with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra during the 1947-48 season. Max Reiter, former assistant to Bruno Walter at the Berlin Opera House, from 1945 until his death in 1950 regularly conducted a Grand Opera Festival of from two to four operas as part of the season's program of the San Antonio, Texas, Symphony Orchestra. The 1951 operas were conducted by Jonel Perlea. These performances are attended by thousands of opera lovers from nearby cities.

At times operas are performed also by the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra under Fabian Sevitzky, by the Houston, Texas, Symphony, and probably by others. In general, though, opera appears in the repertoire of our leading symphonic organizations only occasionally and then in concert versions.

These activities do not by any means exhaust the ways opera is produced in America. It appears in many unorthodox forms when produced by young people unhampered by traditions.

The prewar 9-O'Clock Opera Company, which traveled through the country with a streamlined version of *The Marriage of Figaro*, was

## IN THE COMMUNITY

followed after the war by an equally youthful group, the Lemonade Opera. This cooperative company of young singers, formed in 1947, took its name from the beverage served at their little playhouse in Greenwich Village, New York. Among the operas they played was the American première of Prokofiev's *Duenna* with fifty repeat performances, and as many performances of Weill's *Down in the Valley*. Doing their productions with two-piano accompaniments and fresh staging, the enthusiastic cast alternated their acting and singing roles with those of ushers and scene painters.

The list of such groups could be long: The Amato Opera Theatre in New York, founded in 1948, was an outgrowth of the American Theatre Wing which, "dedicated to bringing opera to schools and communities at strikingly reasonable prices," used simple settings and two-piano accompaniments for its performances. The New Lyric Stage under Frederic Cohen gave operas with young singers mainly at colleges and was financed by the tuition of its students. There have been also the Chamber Opera Society in Philadelphia; the Comedy Opera Guild in San Francisco, which under Erich Weiler gave intimate operas, among them the American première of Isouard's *The Rendezvous*; the Chamber Opera Company in Hollywood; ballet organizations sponsoring opera, such as the Ballet Society of New York, which in 1947 introduced Menotti's *The Telephone* to the American public.

Opera has appeared even in an industrial plant. The Dow Chemical Company in Midland, Michigan, as part of its recreation program sponsors monthly concerts in which its music department, with its own orchestra and mixed chorus, performs operettas or acts from operas in English.

There are a number of nationality opera groups, such as Polish companies in New York, Philadelphia, and Detroit and Russian companies in New York and San Francisco, which produce their own otherwise rarely heard operas. Negro opera companies have been organized in New York, Trenton, Philadelphia, Washington, Pittsburgh, and Chicago. And in Los Angeles the Lavenia Nash Singers, a colored choral group, in 1948 employed white singers for several leading parts in a performance of *Cavalleria* and *Pagliacci*.

Very interesting is the operatic program of the Karamu House in Cleveland, which has two new theaters in a half-million-dollar building erected with the aid of the Rockefeller Foundation. Its Lyric

## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

Theatre presents modern operas such as Carl Orff's *The Wise Maiden* (American première), *Simoon* by Jan Meyerowitz, and Debussy's *Prodigal Son*, and also eighteenth-century operas—all for minimum runs of twenty-four performances each. "It looks as though Karamu's is the first permanent regional lyric theater in this country," says its director, Benno D. Frank.

Even children's companies are busy performing opera in Chicago, New York, and St. Joseph, Michigan. In Chicago this development was largely the work of Zerline Muhlmann-Metzger, the daughter of Adolph Muhlmann, former Wagnerian baritone of the Metropolitan Opera. Mrs. Metzger's recollections of her childhood days at home gave her the idea of producing grand opera with children.

"I myself played opera when three or four years old," she writes. "I was Gretel, the Mother, and the Witch, and also the director and stage manager and made my younger brother be Hänsel and the Father. My father had sung the role of Peter in *Hänsel and Gretel* and we children copied what we had seen on the stage. Instead of having a curtain go up, we tied a string around a nail in the door of the room and opened it by pulling the door from inside. I still experience the thrill of the magic of the unseen string, imagining that our audience would wonder how that door ever opened."

Mrs. Metzger reasoned that "grand opera is the quickest way to make children interested in music through the changes of the different musical moods and portrayal of personalities, that it satisfies their hunger for adventure, and that it also helps them to understand the mythologies, religions, and customs of different nations and people, through wearing other people's costumes, singing their music, acting as they do, interpreting their outlooks on life, and portraying their beliefs and conceptions in mythological and religious ceremonies."

After founding the Fine Art Opera in Chicago in 1922, where student singers from fifteen to thirty years old performed most of the operatic repertoire, not even shunning the difficulties of Wagner's *Ring*, Mrs. Metzger proceeded step by step to organize groups for the younger children. In 1935 she formed the All Children's Grand Opera, for children from six to fifteen. This group not only furnished the children's choruses in *Carmen*, *Tosca*, and *Parsifal* for the grand opera companies playing in Chicago, but performed full operas themselves, mostly in

## IN THE COMMUNITY

foreign languages, with Mrs. Metzger as musical director and Joseph Tessmer as stage director.

Recognizing the educational possibilities of such activities, the Chicago Park District in 1947 sponsored the organization of the District Children's Opera Guild for children of grade-school ages. And in 1948 Mrs. Metzger started the Kindergarten Grand Opera for youngsters from two and a half to six years of age.

Almeda Wallace, Mrs. Metzger's collaborator in Chicago, carried the idea to St. Joseph, Michigan, and there organized the Children's Twin City Opera. And in New York City Eva Leoni's Children's Opera Company produces operas with children from ten to fifteen years of age. When they reach the age of sixteen, they join her Young People's Opera Company.

To round out this list of the somewhat unorthodox in opera: In the Ojai Valley Opera Company of California, repertoire operas have been played by puppets while local artists sang the roles. And in Chicago, local residents and visiting opera stars alike have often enjoyed attending complete opera performances by puppets, synchronized to recordings by famous singers, in a lovely little theater in the Swedish restaurant of opera-loving Mr. Kramer.

Since many of America's bigger cities lie in hot-weather zones, their people favor spending the summer evenings in huge outdoor theaters where, after a day's work, they can enjoy good music in the refreshing air at popular prices. Summer light opera has become an established part of community life in cities like St. Louis, Los Angeles, Memphis, Dallas, Pittsburgh, and Houston, but grand opera appears only occasionally. The six weeks' season of the Cincinnati Summer Opera is about the only such extended and established outdoor opera program in the country.

Since 1922 opera performances have been staged from time to time in the beautiful Hollywood Bowl, one of the world's greatest natural amphitheaters, with a capacity of 20,000. By 1948 twenty-eight performances of fifteen different operas had been presented to audiences totaling 450,000. The sixty-six-acre property of the Hollywood Bowl is owned by the County of Los Angeles, which supplies funds for its promotion and upkeep to the operating, nonprofit Hollywood Bowl



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

Association. The association's general manager, Dr. Karl Wecker, in 1949 estimated the production costs for one opera at the Bowl, if given in two performances, at \$42,000.

Because outdoor production of opera is necessarily of big dimensions and costly, summer organizations in other parts of the country, where weather conditions may involve additional risks, have increasingly abandoned the project. New York City's Stadium Concerts and Robin Hood Dell in Philadelphia, both of which formerly produced several popular operas during their summer seasons, have turned to concert performances of operas like *Madame Butterfly* and *Tosca* under Mitropoulos. Only Salmaggi continues to offer summer performances to opera-loving New Yorkers.

There is an occasional opera performance at the Washington, D.C., Watergate, at Grant Park in Chicago, and in a few other outdoor theaters. Sometimes a light opera company like that in Little Rock, Arkansas, produces a *Carmen*, or a well-established civic organization like the Redlands, California, Community Music Association takes the financial risk of an operatic production, or a popular grand opera may appear in the schedule of a small summer company like the Arundel Civic Light Opera Association in Kennebunk, Maine.

In Denver a free-to-the-public Opera Festival, originated in 1935 by Florence Lamont Hinman and the *Denver Post*, is held at Cheeseman Park with audiences of 50,000. During the first two summers the "high spots" of popular operas were performed with a narrator at a microphone to knit the story together. Since then musical comedy and light opera have replaced the grand opera excerpts.

In general, the production of summer outdoor opera in America enjoys public acclaim, but it lacks the necessary financial security because of the high expenses and the relatively low returns at popular prices. Montreal in Canada seems to be more fortunate. There the city government and private sponsors contribute substantially to the support of the summer opera productions.

Since Richard Wagner inaugurated the Bayreuth Festivals, the music-loving public has felt that the full enjoyment of opera could best be found away from our industrial centers, in an atmosphere of natural beauty and historic associations. The famous European festivals of Salzburg, Florence, Venice, and more recently Edinburgh owe

## IN THE COMMUNITY

their extraordinary spirit to this atmosphere, which affords equal inspiration to the artists and the public. The programs of these festivals are comprehensive, embracing the various arts of concert music, drama, opera, ballet, and fine arts. But the greatest American music festival, Koussevitzky's Berkshire Festival at Tanglewood in Lenox, Massachusetts, is devoted almost wholly to symphonic music, limiting opera to the school performances of the Berkshire Music Center.

On the other hand, the historic old mining town of Central City in the Rocky Mountains, near Denver, Colorado, has developed an opera festival that includes the occasional presentation of a play. But the unique possibilities of the area for a rounded program of all the arts have not been realized here either.

In 1859, when Colorado was newly discovered territory, John Gregory struck gold near Central City, and within a short time the surrounding valley, called "the Little Kingdom of Gilpin," attracted more than 15,000 people and became known as "the richest square mile on earth." The many Welsh and Cornish miners who came to work there loved their singing societies, and in 1860 they built a log cabin theater where not only plays, such as "A Trip across the Ocean (A show any lady can see)," but folk operas like *The Bohemian Girl* were performed.

This theater burned down in the fire of 1874, and four years later the new stone "Opera House" was built with funds raised by popular subscription. To play in this "finest theater west of 'The River'" the greatest actors of the day traveled up through the canyons on the narrow-gauge railway—which can still be seen in Central City—or by stagecoach, and they always stayed at the famous Teller House. There a pavement of solid silver bricks was laid when President Grant came to visit what was at that time the most important town in the Rocky Mountains region.

When the boom days passed, the bonanza kings moved to the cities and Central City became a ghost town. But the memory of its past was not forgotten by the descendants of the pioneers.

In 1931, the McFarlane family, who had inherited the Opera House, presented it to the University of Denver. The next year two distinguished women, Anne Evans and Ida Kruse McFarlane, restored the theater and the Teller House and, finding in Robert Edmond Jones an artistic collaborator of sensitive vision, started a "play festival" as

## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

a memorial to Colorado's pioneers. Every summer a play or a light opera was performed.

The first opera, *The Bartered Bride*, appeared on the program in 1940 with Frank St. Leger as producer, and between 1941 and 1948 classic opera took a solid foothold at Central City. Except for four seasons in which the festival was suspended because of the war, two operas were given alternately every summer during a three weeks' period. St. Leger and Emil Cooper were the musical directors and I served as stage director. There were unforgettable experiences for both public and artists in these performances of operas like Gluck's *Orfeo* and Beethoven's *Fidelio*, given in English, with fine casts of young singers well rehearsed, with good acting, new scenery and costumes by Robert Edmond Jones and Donald Oenslager, a fine ballet under Lillian Cushing, and an enthusiastic chorus under Florence Lamont Hinman.

In 1949 financial considerations forced a temporary change to one light opera, but in 1950 grand opera was back on the program with *Madame Butterfly* and Donizetti's *Don Pasquale*. In 1951 the season was increased to four weeks and the number of operas to four: Menotti's *Amelia Goes to the Ball* and Suppé's *The Beautiful Galatea* in a double bill, plus *Don Pasquale* again and Gounod's *Romeo and Juliet*. Production costs for the season were budgeted at \$110,000, which seemed sure to be covered by ticket sales, subscriptions, and such other sources of revenue as the operation of the hotel. The deficit on the 1950 season was only \$265.

In the words of Elmer Nagy, the artistic director, the only trouble with Central City "is that there aren't a hundred of them."<sup>7</sup>

The nearby Red Rocks open-air theater, built by the architect Burnham Hoyt and finished since the war, is a potential in the Denver region that has not yet been utilized for opera. It is one of the most beautiful outdoor theaters in the world, with a seating capacity of about 9000, and also, thanks to its location within gigantic rocks, it has unusually good acoustics. Here Wagner's *Valkyrie* seems to wait for awakening from her long sleep.

With the production of grand opera on modern popular lines at Red Rocks and exquisite chamber opera at Central City, with Colorado Springs nearby, and with the development of musical and cultural activity that has begun at Aspen, a few hours' drive away—all en-

## IN THE COMMUNITY

hanced by the beautiful landscape and climate of the Rockies—the region around Denver could provide an American summer festival of a uniquely splendid and inspiring kind—and one in which opera would have its legitimate place.

Another place where Americans feel the pulsebeat of their own history is Roanoke Island in North Carolina. Here in 1937 the musical folk play *The Lost Colony* by Paul Green was presented as a local celebration of the 350th anniversary of the first English settlement in America and the birth of Virginia Dare, the first English child born on American soil.

Paul Green called *The Lost Colony* a “symphonic drama.” “It’s not a perfect-fitting term,” he explained, “but the best I can find, better than music or musical drama. In the original sense it means ‘sounding together’—music, song, dance, pantomime, etc.”<sup>8</sup> Its success was so great that the public requested that it be presented annually, and every summer since 1937 *The Lost Colony* has been performed five or six times a week from July 1 to Labor Day, under the direction of Samuel Selden, with professional actors, originally from the Federal Theatre project, the Carolina Playmakers of the University of North Carolina, a group of singers from the Westminster Choir School in Princeton, New Jersey, and the active participation of the native islanders and fisherfolk. This is probably the longest production record of any musical festival play in the world.

The first few summers an improvised theater was used, but in 1939 this was made into the permanent Waterside Theatre, seating 4500 people, by the sponsoring group, the Roanoke Island Historical Association, with the assistance of the Works Progress Administration.

Encouraged with this success away from the commercial theater of Broadway and Hollywood, Paul Green wrote another symphonic drama, *The Common Glory*, which he first produced at the new Matoaka Lake Amphitheatre at historic Williamsburg, Virginia, in the summer of 1947. And again Green’s poetic and musical dramatization of a piece of America’s history became part of an annual summer festival. This time his subject was the Revolutionary War, Jefferson’s draft of the Declaration of Independence in Williamsburg, his struggles at Jamestown, and the restoration of his faith in the American ideal of human equality as the “common glory” of mankind.

A third musical festival play and outdoor theater were conceived and



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

brought to reality by Paul Green for the celebration of the sesquicentennial of the nation's capital in 1950. Under the title *Faith of Our Fathers*, Green on this occasion dramatized the life of George Washington between 1783 and 1789 and his services to the nation in these critical early years of its history.

As we have seen, North Carolina seems to be a fertile soil for grass-roots developments in the operatic field, and festivals have been important in the movement. It began with a small studio opera group which presented Mozart's *Bastien and Bastienne* at the 1938 Asheville Mozart Festival under the direction of Thor Johnson, festival director, and Clifford Bair, opera director. *The Marriage of Figaro* followed in 1939 and *Così fan tutte* in 1940, both in English.

In 1941 the Festival Opera Group was expanded into a statewide organization and a six weeks' training school was set up at Salem College. By 1943 the local festival had developed into an annual project of the entire area and was called the Piedmont Festival of Music and Art; it combined music, drama, opera, concert, and fine arts in a regional event.

Thereafter a number of operatic groups were organized in nearby places—for instance, the Winston-Salem Little Theatre Opera, the Euterpe Opera Group in Greensboro, the Mt. Airy Operatic Club, the Raleigh Opera in Concert, and the Charlotte Opera Association. And A. J. Fletcher, "State Chairman for Opera" of the North Carolina Federation of Music Clubs in Raleigh, engaged Robert C. Bird as full-time director "for the purpose of bringing opera to every community in the state." A string of festivals originated, among them one in Cape Fear, the Eastern Seaboard Festival in Raleigh, and the Magnolia Festival of Wake Forest.

The opera productions of most of these organizations were directed by Clifford Bair. According to his statement, "A resumé of the records reveals that from August 1938 to August 1948 the opera program of our North Carolina Opera-Festivals-Community Arts movement has involved 94 performances of 28 works before audiences totaling over 75,000 with over 2000 performers participating. Still more stimulating is the record of our 'graduates,' who are pursuing professional music theater careers in this country and Europe. Their record and the growing tide of interest within the state and in the country at large illustrate what can be accomplished by a program which has for its thesis

## IN THE COMMUNITY

'music and art of the people, by the people, and for the people' and which stresses the local development of cultural forces under professional music theater leadership."

In 1944 Clifford Bair became chairman of the National Committee of Opera, which had been organized by Edwin Hughes, executive secretary of the National Music Council, and was commissioned to set up the National Association for Opera.

In this organization, according to Vernon Hammond, its secretary, "members of amateur groups, university organizations, conservatories of music, and professional opera companies are represented. The NAO is especially interested in the decentralization of operatic production in order to provide opportunities for American singers, conductors, and stage directors. It is anxious to publicize opera written by American composers and to bring about their production. Although it is not opposed to the production of opera in foreign languages, it is anxious to make good English translations available and thus to promote the cause of Opera in English. It endeavors to serve its members by providing lists of translations, chamber operas, American operas, etc., and by providing information to those who wish to establish new opera producing groups."

One important objective of the NAO is the organization of regional and national opera festivals for the encouragement of native talent. The first regional opera festival, an Eastern Seaboard Festival, was held at Raleigh, North Carolina, in the summer of 1947, the first national opera festival at Milwaukee in 1948. At the latter, audiences of 12,000 to 14,000 attended the two performances of operatic excerpts and *Cavalleria Rusticana*.

As Clifford Bair has said, the National Association for Opera is still in many ways "an organization of mutual service to the Daniel Boones of opera, people who like myself have gone out to the people and are doing the best they can with what we have," but it is trying to strengthen these native attempts in order to lay the foundation for a future musical theater of the people.

This survey of new operatic endeavors is by no means complete, but it surely demonstrates the genuine growth of public interest and the ferment of experimentation in new organizations throughout the country, especially since the outbreak of World War II. All these experi-

## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

ments—opera on Broadway, civic opera companies, and community festivals—have one goal in common: to find indigenous, characteristically American ways of producing opera for its new audience.

In structure, in specific purpose, in general approach, in ways and means, the new operatic ventures show a wide and probably healthy diversity; they range from amateurishness to professionalism, routine to imagination, genuine appreciation to snobbism, commercialism to idealism. But out of the seemingly endless variety certain common aims seem to be emerging:

1. To establish broader community sponsorship—enlisting donors and guarantors among individuals and business organizations by subscription campaigns, organizing auxiliary guilds, conducting educational programs, seeking income from radio, and in some places securing active official support by the local government.

2. To use local artists as much as possible.

3. To add to the standard repertoire, as soon as it is financially feasible, less well-known older works and contemporary operas.

4. To produce opera not in the “grand” manner, but as musical theater.

5. To use the English language whenever practicable.

6. To make the singers part of the ensemble and their acting of essential importance.

7. To make the local group’s own scenery and costumes in an original way, whenever possible.

No one, least of all the leaders of the new opera groups, will claim that all these aims have been accomplished as yet. The problems of obtaining adequate financial sponsorship and of achieving professional artistic standards are still the main obstacles to a true civic opera. Nonetheless, great strides have been made and new production methods are being developed. Twenty, even ten, years ago the question was whether there was a place for opera in the American community. Today the question is, How can its artistic existence be made secure?

# OPERA

## *in the schools*

**THE GROWTH** of a truly American opera has been fostered in decisive fashion by the development of music schools throughout the country. And this, as we have pointed out, was in large part the result of the opportunity and the need for training at home created by World War II. By the end of that war the number of music schools in the United States had risen from fewer than twenty-five to some three hundred. About eighty of these schools give opera performances every year, and some sixty have regular opera departments.

With these schools has originated a new teaching and training method that is unknown in Europe: namely, the opera "workshop." Such a workshop is really a little experimental opera theater, designed to fill the gap that exists in America between school training and engagements with major professional companies. In this respect, opera workshops are the American substitutes for the Middle European "Stadttheaters."

Today there are many of these workshops in existence, most of them in connection with a university, college, or music school, though some



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

are independent groups sponsored by local opera guilds and clubs. They range from amateur groups, which exploit without discrimination the common human desire to "play a role," to organizations of true professional quality.

The production aims and methods of the better workshops are very different from those of the traditional grand opera companies. They seek to emphasize dramatic ensemble, good acting, opera in English, and the production of new works along simple modern lines, with small apparatus for the stage and the orchestra.

One of the first of these school opera groups developed at Koussevitzky's Berkshire Music Center at Tanglewood in Massachusetts, from a suggestion I made in 1939. With World War II threatening to break out in Europe, I decided to spend the summer in America trying to make myself familiar with the summertime operatic activities in this country. Olin Downes advised me to visit the Music Festival at Tanglewood and there introduced me to Dr. Koussevitzky after the last concert of the season.

The next morning at Artur Rodzinski's home, where Dr. Koussevitzky was staying at the time, I heard him outline his ideas and dreams for the school of the Berkshire Music Center, which was to open the next summer (1940). He talked, too, about his plans for festive musical plays to be given along the lines of Greek musical dramas and scenic oratorios, and about his hope of building a huge open-air theater on the meadow which slopes down from the concert "Shed" to the lake.

I was enthusiastic about this prospect and immediately suggested the addition of an opera department to the program of the new school as a first step toward making opera a part of the Tanglewood festival. At Dr. Koussevitzky's request I put this suggestion into writing, assuring him that all that would be needed for a beginning, in addition to my work as a dramatic teacher, would be a music instructor, a room sufficiently large to permit the acting of a group of singers, a piano, and the help of his office staff. The expenses would therefore be modest.

This proposal was accepted by Dr. Koussevitzky and his board and opera became part of the Music Center's curriculum in time for the school's opening.

I asked Boris Goldovsky, then in Cleveland, to assist me, and we held auditions and began rehearsing opera scenes, working in the

## IN THE SCHOOLS

garage adjacent to the small temporary stage which at that time served all the various activities of the school. As soon as we saw the excellent qualifications our singers had for certain roles, we wanted to give a performance of opera scenes, but no funds for such a purpose had been provided in the budget.

Fortunately, Gaston, the superintendent of the Tanglewood grounds, who lived in a little house near the garage, enjoyed the enthusiasm of the young singers—and perhaps also the good looks of some of the would-be prima donnas. He gave us permission to browse through his house and take along a stove, a couch, a table, two chairs, a water glass and two bottles, a house key and two candles. And there we were, all set to go into production with the scene between Rudolph and Mimi in Act I of *La Bohème*.

In a similar manner, we got together the necessary properties for some other scenes and our first performance of opera excerpts took place.

Its success increased our appetite. Now we wanted to perform an entire opera. There was a fine student orchestra at Tanglewood, but there was no money to pay for the renting of the necessary scenery and lighting equipment. Dr. Koussevitzky, always with an open heart for young artists, counseled patience; we would find a way out. And we did.

Wandering through the beautiful French gardens at Tanglewood, I realized that we could not ask for more beautiful scenery than this natural setting, and that if we gave an opera in these gardens during the afternoon, we would need little scenery and no electric lighting. And it occurred to me that a fitting opera would be Handel's *Acis and Galatea*, which has some of the loveliest of operatic music, a story well related to nature, and a book in English by no less an author than John Gay, librettist of *The Beggar's Opera*. So nobody could object to our singing opera in English.

I persuaded Richard Rychtarik, a designer and friend of mine, who had made the sets of the operas that Rodzinski produced in Cleveland, to come to help with the staging for only his travel expenses, and he devised the loveliest stage set imaginable. The students built a platform with lumber found nearby and planted it with natural flowers. By using tarboard to cover structures made of wood, Rychtarik achieved the effect of natural rocks. Actually, this set did not

## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

look like operatic scenery, but like a part of the gardens, lifted up into the view of the audience.

The simple peasant costumes were made by the students themselves, and the orchestra—as in the first Florentine operas—was placed out of sight behind some hedges, where the conductor could be seen by the singers on the stage but neither he nor the players were visible to the audience. The combination of Handel's little master-work, not too "grand" an opera, the sincerity of the young singers, and the beauty of the place made the performance a little gem which the small invited group of listeners found deeply moving.

In this group was Mrs. Curtis Bok (later Mrs. Efrem Zimbalist), president of the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, and the next morning she sent Dr. Koussevitzky a substantial check as a decisive first contribution toward a new theater. This was built according to plans drawn by the famous architects, Saarinen and Saarinen, father and son, and was finished in time for the next summer's program.

From then on opera was established at the Berkshire Music Center. Complete performances of *Così fan tutte* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* were given during the two succeeding summer sessions, and after an interruption caused by gasoline rationing during the war, the opera department, then under Boris Goldovsky's direction, produced a number of contemporary operas and such rarely heard older ones as Mozart's *Idomeneo* and Gluck's *Iphigenia in Tauris*. Among the new works were the American première of Benjamin Britten's *Peter Grimes* (1946), which Dr. Koussevitzky had commissioned expressly for the opera department, and the same composer's *Albert Herring* (1949). During the summer of 1950 Jan Popper directed the department and conducted, with F. Cowles Strickland as stage director, the first American performance of Ibert's *opéra comique*, *Le Roi d'Yvetot*.

Universities have taken an active lead in establishing operatic departments and workshops, and of considerable impetus and assistance in this development has been the availability of a goodly number of operatic artists—conductors, directors, designers, singers—who had fled from Hitlerism and joined the ranks of American educators in colleges and universities the country over. Eager to work as teachers of opera in their new country, they have constituted a nucleus of experienced personnel without which the growth of opera training in

## IN THE SCHOOLS

institutions of higher education would almost certainly have been a good deal slower.

One of the first university opera departments developed—quite naturally in view of the operatic history of New Orleans—at Louisiana State University at Baton Rouge. It was founded in 1929 as a unit of the university's school of music, and its staff has included operatic professionals of the first rank, such as Louis Hasselmans as conductor and the late Pasquale Amato and then Ralph Errolle as stage directors.

This opera department gives one major production a year, which is repeated about five times because of the limited seating capacity of its theater, and three or four opera workshop programs made up of scenes from various operas; these are given with simple staging and piano accompaniments. The productions are prepared in cooperation with several other university departments—the department of speech contributing the scenery, the students of home economics making the costumes, the physical education department training the dancers.

Since the beginning of the 1948–49 session a candidate for admission to the opera curriculum must have a bachelor's degree. It is not required that this degree be in music, although that is considered desirable. Second, the candidate must have a vocal equipment that, in the opinion of the majority of the voice faculty, justifies his entering upon the professional study of opera. Acceptance of a candidate therefore depends on an audition, and the number of students admitted is limited to twenty.

Barrett Stout, director of the school of music, points out the advantages of this plan: "The students, having a baccalaureate degree, will be more mature physically and vocally. They will be better able to decide whether they want to make a try at an operatic career. And they will not be disturbed in their pursuit of a good general education too early."

The three-year curriculum covers the following subjects: speech (phonetics), voice, languages (especially French, Italian, and German), diction, music theory, song literature, music history, opera repertoire, opera laboratory, science and art of singing, and platform technique. Students interested in opera but not registered in this specialized curriculum may enroll in the opera laboratory courses, either for credit or as auditors, in order to study and sing opera for personal pleasure and enrichment.



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

With a comprehensive program of study and the new restrictions limiting admission to graduate students of proven vocal qualifications, Louisiana State University has initiated valuable safeguards for the future of its students in a field where professional opportunities are still scarce.

Stanford University at Palo Alto, California, organized an opera workshop in 1940 with a curriculum that soon achieved distinction under the direction of Herbert Jan Popper. Beginning in 1941, major productions of opera were presented by the "Stanford Players," an organization of the drama department working in cooperation with the music department and the opera workshop. The physical education department furnished the dancers. F. Cowles Strickland and Wendell Cole, both of the faculty of the drama department, were the stage director and the designer.

Students in the orchestra and chorus have received academic credit for their work. The soloists have been mostly students in the opera workshop or young professional singers engaged for one role at a time. A few union members have been added to the orchestra if needed. The scenery and costumes have been made by students in the drama department.

In 1948 the workshop was transferred to the university extension program so that young singers could participate in its activities without enrolling for a full university course. Regularly matriculated students who can meet the audition requirements receive academic credit for one of the three quarters of the workshop course, which lasts from January through August. Each quarter may be taken separately, Italian opera being studied in the winter quarter, French opera in the spring, and German in the summer.

One-act operas and scenes from longer works have been performed every six weeks and an entire opera is given at the end of each quarter—all of these in the original languages. Major productions in English are given once a year. Among the most successful of these have been two modern works: Britten's *Peter Grimes* and Weinberger's *Schwanda, the Bagpiper*, both of which were repeated with considerable acclaim in special performances at the San Francisco Opera House.

"Operatic productions on campus," Mr. Popper stated in 1949, "have greatly increased the understanding of, and interest in, opera among the students and within the community. Opera literature courses

## IN THE SCHOOLS

which numbered 25-35 students in 1940 now have as many as 115 students enrolled. Most of the opera performances are sold out well in advance. Approximately 1500 people were turned away from the box office for *Peter Grimes*. The invitation issued by the business manager of the San Francisco Opera House for the past two years is a further sign of the growing popularity of these college opera productions. The repertoire tries to avoid the usual stand-bys like *La Traviata* and *Cavalleria* and concentrates on valuable works which can otherwise not be heard in this vicinity."

"Opera at Columbia is small scale, experimental, and not a bit grand, but it is opera, it's American, and it is exciting because its concern is with the future."<sup>1</sup>

This was the comment of Douglas Moore, head of the department of music at Columbia University, about the program of the opera workshop which was organized at Columbia in 1943 with Nicholas Goldschmidt as musical director and me as stage director.

Under the headship of Willard Rhodes and with John Wolmut and Felix Brentano as stage directors, the workshop has made substantial progress. Its members give one or two productions a year, sometimes in the form of an evening of opera scenes, sometimes a complete new opera such as Vaughan Williams' *Sir John in Love* in its American première or revivals of neglected eighteenth-century works like the operas by Méhul.

More ambitiously the opera workshop collaborates with the Columbia Theater Associates, a play-producing group of which Milton Smith, head of the drama department, is the director and Otto Luening the musical director, to offer an annual series of performances—usually three plays and two operas—at a series price of \$2.25 for university students and \$3.50 for nonstudents. Increasingly this program has come to emphasize the performance of new operas by contemporary composers, and this fact—together with the work of the Alice M. Ditson Fund, which for several years has commissioned one new opera each year as a feature of the Annual Festival of Contemporary Music—has made the activity at Columbia a decisive influence in furthering modern opera in America.

Menotti's *The Medium* and *The Barrier* by Meyerowitz and Hughes both made their way to Broadway from first performances at Colum-

## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

bia University. And Virgil Thomson's *The Mother of Us All*, Benjamin Britten's *Paul Bunyan*, Otto Luening's *Evangeline*, and Douglas Moore's *Giants in the Earth* were all given their premières by this university project. Ernst Bacon's *A Tree on the Plains*, originally produced at Converse College in South Carolina, was given its first New York performance at Columbia.

As at Stanford, the Columbia opera workshop has been organized as a part of the university extension courses in order to permit greater flexibility in the matter of participants. "The personnel of our organization," Director Rhodes states, "is composed of faculty and students, some of whom are members of union organizations. In some instances we have had to look outside our own membership for help in direction and personnel, but it is our objective to be as self-sufficient as possible." And he calls attention to the fact that "our workshop numbers singers, conductors, stage directors, and composers among its students. We are making every effort to provide laboratory facilities for all qualified students who are interested in the various fields of opera production."

The success of these first university workshops encouraged other music departments to follow their lead. Many had given occasional opera performances long before, mostly in collaboration with their drama departments. It needed only the will and some initiative to organize the existing forces and facilities into a new department or workshop.

At Denver University, Florence Lamont Hinman, director of the Lamont School of Music, organized an opera department in addition to her many other activities as musical educator. Since 1944 she has produced an opera every summer, the choices ranging from classic works like Bach's *Coffee Cantata* and Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*, to modern operas like Bacon's *A Tree on the Plains*, which was directed by the composer, and Virgil Thomson's *Mother of Us All*.

The nearby University of Colorado at Boulder and Colorado College at Colorado Springs have also added opera departments to their music schools.

The school of music of the University of Michigan has organized an opera workshop which cooperates with the members of the speech department in the presentation (of two operas in English each year.) Fisk University at Nashville, Tennessee, started an opera department

## IN THE SCHOOLS

in 1944, and their annual student performance is equally popular on the campus and in the community. The University of Chicago's music department has sponsored the University of Chicago Opera Association, which specialized in revivals of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century operas.

And in Greenville, South Carolina, the Bob Jones University Opera Association, organized as a part of the university, has presented two repertoire operas each school year since 1942. Most of these operas have been sung in the original languages. After three months of rehearsing, two performances of each opera are given in the university auditorium, which seats 2700 and is equipped with modern stage facilities. With the exception of some guest artists imported for leading roles, the casts consist entirely of students and faculty members. For students admission to all performances is included in the tuition fees, but season and individual tickets are sold to others at the box office.

Karl E. Keefer, dean of the Bob Jones University school of fine arts, adds this comment: "We feel that our plan has proved very successful for our purposes. The students of our music department, as well as the general student, have the opportunity of studying the techniques of outstanding artists and at the same time of gaining an appreciation of good music."

Texas institutions have been very active in this field. The University of Texas at Austin sponsors its own university opera company, and Texas Christian University at Fort Worth is expanding its training for opera through close cooperation with the Fort Worth Civic Opera Association. Baylor University at Waco founded an opera workshop under Daniel Sternberg as a regular activity of its school of music in 1945. All participants are students or faculty members of the school of music and the drama department. The workshop is "primarily concerned with the preparation of the opera productions, although it also features courses in opera repertoire, foreign diction, etc., which have no direct bearing upon any one production." Either one full-length opera or two shorter works are given each year, in two to four performances in the Waco Hall Auditorium, which seats about 2500. The operas are always performed in English and only after plenty of rehearsals.

Hardin-Simmons University at Abilene, Texas, started a university



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

opera group in 1947. Frederick Tooley, professor of voice and opera director, wrote me in 1949: "Hardin-Simmons is a university long associated with the cowboy, having been founded by old-time cowboys and ranchers. Therefore, it has been only within the past two years that opera has been able to compete here with the customary rodeos and the university's world-famous cowboy band. . . . I have always believed that students can best appreciate opera if allowed to be an integral part of its inner workings. At any rate, there was much enthusiasm expressed by all the students, as well as by the townspeople, following our two performances this year of *The Tales of Hoffmann*. Opera has definitely taken hold out here as an educational 'must'."

After the appointment of Ernst Bacon as director of the school of music of the University of Syracuse, New York, in 1945, opera was soon established there too. From a course in opera technique under Ruth Ives, an opera workshop and a university opera company were developed the following year. In addition, fifteen-minute weekly programs of opera scenes sung by students were broadcast over the local radio station. The workshop has laid stress on opera in English and on contemporary opera.

Across the Canadian border, at the Royal Conservatory of Music of the University of Toronto, it was to be expected that opera training would receive encouragement when Edward Johnson became chairman of the conservatory's board of directors. Arnold M. Walter, director of the Senior School, made rapid progress with the establishment of an opera school. In a performance of operatic scenes in 1946, given under Nicholas Goldschmidt as musical director and Felix Brentano as stage director, the chorus of the prisoners from *Fidelio* made such an impression that the importance of such a school for Canadian singers was quickly realized. Full opera performances followed: four operas in English each season, with repeat performances soon being given outside of Toronto.

In 1948 the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation organized, in collaboration with the university's opera school, a CBC Opera Company with Goldschmidt as conductor. The program of its second season consisted of five or six full-length operas, among them the Canadian première of *Peter Grimes*. And from the opera school, now with Herman Geiger-Tourel as dramatic teacher, new roots began to sprout.

## IN THE SCHOOLS

"As far as stage performances are concerned," Director Walter wrote in 1949, "we are about to form a company and will continue the work so far done by our school opera. That company will be independent of the university, which will continue to look after the opera school itself. If we are successful in forming the company, we will have a short operatic season in Toronto, after which we will take our production to Montreal, Ottawa, etc." Soon this Royal Conservatory Opera Company had become a reality, and in the spring of 1950 it presented an eight-day opera festival in Toronto that included performances of *La Bohème*, *Rigoletto*, and *Don Giovanni*.

The music school of Indiana University in Bloomington established its opera department in 1948. With Ernst Hoffman as conductor and Hans Busch as stage director, *The Tales of Hoffmann* was produced with an all-student cast in the spring of that year, and almost immediately the young department was entrusted with the world première of Kurt Weill's new folk opera, *Down in the Valley*.

This work had been written mainly for performance by nonprofessional opera groups. It had originated from the idea of a thirteen-week radio series built around American folk songs which an advertising salesman suggested to Olin Downes of the New York Times. Downes approved the idea and proposed Kurt Weill as composer and Arnold Sundgaard as librettist. They wrote the opera but the radio series never materialized. Then some years later Hans W. Heinsheimer of G. Schirmer and company, music publishers, asked Weill for an opera suited to the needs and purposes of the many small operatic groups that were being formed. Weill suggested Down in the Valley. He and Sundgaard revised the work for the stage and the result was a one-act folk opera with a simple, moving plot and musical and scenic requirements well within the possibilities for small amateur groups.

The libretto tells the story of Brack Weaver who loves Jennie Parsons. Brack is to die on the gallows for slaying his rival Thomas Bouché. The night before the execution he breaks out of jail to meet his sweetheart Jennie once more and be assured of her love. They meet near her house, and in the love scene between them the story flashes back to the church where they first met and to the dance hall where the fatal killing took place. Then the lovers say goodbye, and

## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

Brack, convinced of Jennie's love, goes back to prison with a peaceful mind, while Jennie and the chorus join in the last verse of the folk song "Down in the Valley," which is the theme song of the opera.

In his foreword to the score Weill stated: "It can be performed wherever a chorus, a few singers, and a few actors are available. In colleges and universities it should be produced through the combined efforts of both the drama and music departments (since the combination of drama and music is the basis of 'opera')."

Musically, *Down in the Valley* is built around the theme song and four other American folk songs, which are connected by dialogue, recitatives, and short chorus and dance numbers. The performance of the opera, which lasts about forty minutes, requires four singing voices of moderate vocal range for the leading roles, which "should provide good training for the specific type of singing actor who has become such an important asset of the musical theater in America." Besides these, the score calls for a few speaking parts, a chorus, and an orchestra of 21 to 26 pieces (if this is not available, one or two pianos can be used in its place).

Weill suggests that scenically the production can be "as simple as a 'dramatic' concert performance where the principals act their scenes in front of the chorus, without any help of scenery. If scenery is used, it should consist of some simply painted frames indicating the place of action (jail, porch, church, etc.) which are placed in front of the chorus. The lighting can be as elaborate as the available equipment allows and can be of great help to the dramatic continuity, if it is used carefully and if the technique of fading-out on one scene while fading-in on the next is handled smoothly."

From its first performance at Indiana University, *Down in the Valley* made its way within one year onto hundreds of stages, played by school workshops, amateur groups, and professional companies—testifying to the progress the new operatic movement had made and to the consequent need for the kind of work Weill and Sundgaard had composed.

The opera department at Indiana University made remarkable progress in the next few years. At Eastertime in 1949 an all-student performance of *Parsifal* in English was such a success that it was repeated the next year and was on its way toward becoming an annual part of the Easter season at the university. In 1950 the opera depart-

## IN THE SCHOOLS

ment also staged the first performances of two one-act works: a tragic opera, *The Veil*, composed by Bernard Rogers to a libretto by Robert Lawrence, dealing with the weird happenings in a madhouse outside London; and a comic opera, *The Jumping Frog*, with music by Lukas Foss to a book based on Mark Twain's short story, "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County."

The performances are mostly given in the beautiful university auditorium, which is also the home of the annual guest performances by the Metropolitan Opera.

"The main idea of our whole project," says Stage Director Busch, "is to provide the students with a full professional training and experience in the different styles of the operatic repertory; and to present all-around productions of opera which at the present moment cannot be afforded in the commercial field. In other words, to bring opera to the people through performances exclusively in English—to make opera a naturalized citizen of the USA."

The University of Minnesota is host not only to the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra in its modern Northrop Auditorium, which has a capacity of 5000, but also to the annual visits of the Metropolitan Opera each May. In 1949 its drama department under Frank M. Whiting collaborated successfully with the music department in the production of a historical pageant, *Rifle, Axe and Plow*, dealing with the founding of Minnesota Territory; the music was composed by James Aliferis, director of the university chorus. After this venture both departments began working on plans for opera performances. A presentation of Weill's *Down in the Valley* and Pergolesi's *The Maid as Mistress (La Serva Padrona)* in the summer of 1950 was the beginning, followed by a production of Menotti's *The Telephone* and *The Medium* in 1951.

Out on the Pacific Coast, the University of Washington at Seattle, which had produced an occasional opera since the early 1930s, founded an opera workshop under Stanley Chapple in 1947. With Eugene Linden as associate conductor and the assistance of the school of drama's production staff, it produced classic operas such as *Dido and Aeneas* as well as modern works like Menotti's *The Medium* and Vaughan Williams' *The Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains*.

Although the University of California at Berkeley has not organized any regular opera department, its music and dramatic art depart-



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

ments have collaborated in several opera productions. Among them was the world première in 1947 of Roger Sessions' first opera, *The Trial of Lucullus*. This work, with a libretto by Bertolt Brecht, has thirteen scenes and runs about an hour and a half in length; it uses the trial of a Roman conqueror to portray the ruin inflicted by modern dictatorships.

At the University of California at Los Angeles, Franz Waxman produced and Heinrich Schnitzler staged a number of modern operas, including Honegger's *Jeanne d'Arc au Bûcher* and Stravinsky's *L'Histoire du Soldat* with the composer conducting. When Jan Popper transferred his activity to this university from Stanford, an opera department was formed and began to produce works like Britten's version of *The Beggar's Opera* staged by Schnitzler.

In 1948 the University of Southern California, where in 1944 Ernst Gebert had produced Handel's *Julius Caesar*, engaged Carl Ebert, director of Glyndebourne fame, to head an opera department. The next year he presented the West Coast première of Richard Strauss's *Ariadne auf Naxos*, with Wolfgang Martin, formerly of the Metropolitan Opera, conducting. In 1950 Ebert and Martin presented two contemporary one-act operas in a double bill: the world première of Ernst Krenek's *Dark Waters* and the West Coast première of Ernst Toch's *The Real Princess*.

Even without claiming to complete the list of American universities which are teaching and producing opera in some form as part of their educational activities, we must include Western Reserve University, the Universities of Arizona, Georgia, Illinois, Kansas City, Nebraska, North Dakota, and Oregon, Nebraska's Wesleyan University, Illinois Wesleyan, and Oregon's Pacific University.

But this movement is not limited to the universities; a substantial number of the smaller colleges are also producing opera for the benefit of their students. We can only mention some of them—enough to indicate the scope and variety of their activities.

Queens College in Flushing, New York, has had an opera workshop since 1947; with an independent student staff, it produced the American première of Gustav Holst's *Savitri* and New York City's first performance of *Down in the Valley*. Hunter College in New York City offers a regular class in opera, and in 1950 Sarah Lawrence College in

## IN THE SCHOOLS

Bronxville, New York, made an interesting student production of the first stage performance of *The Triumph of Joan* by Norman Dello Joio.

Stephens College at Columbia, Missouri, has an opera department under Edward Murphy which produces one opera each year. Jacksonville College in Florida offers a class in opera. And we have seen that Converse College at Spartanburg, South Carolina, produced Ernst Bacon's *A Tree on the Plains* for the first time, and that Belhaven College at Jackson, Mississippi, has sponsored the organization of a local opera company.

Alabama's Polytechnic Institute gives two operas every year—under handicaps that Hollace E. Arment, head of the music department, describes with humor: "Our operas are pure 'home talent,' presented in our ancient auditorium which has a small stage, no wing space, no flies, no loft, no storage space, no make-up rooms, no love, no nothing. The miracle is that we do it anyway." But, considering that "very few operas come to this town to provide the experience of learning opera," the works presented—for instance, *La Traviata* and *Faust*—must be of real significance for students and townspeople both.

North Texas State College at Denton has an opera department that produces about three operas a year, and Christian College in Abilene has presented opera annually since 1947, as a joint effort of the school's music, speech, art, and home economics departments and resident bands. There is also an opera department at Los Angeles City College under Hugo Strelitzer, dean of Southern California's opera producers, who has directed his students in various operas in English, including *Fidelio* in 1948. And the George Pepperdine College in Los Angeles has an opera workshop that has even ventured to perform *The Magic Flute*.

By no means negligible are the developments in the same direction at the specialized conservatories or schools of music and in connection with private studios. These continue to be primarily concerned with the vocal and dramatic schooling of young operatic artists, but they too have realized the necessity for adding workshops or other opportunities for actual performances if their students' studies are to have any practical purpose.

In 1942 the Julius Hartt School of Music in Hartford, Connecticut, organized a performing group, the Hartt Opera Productions, as an

## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

addition to the school's opera department, which is headed by the famous former Wagnerian baritone of the Metropolitan, Friedrich Schorr. The Hartt Opera Productions are conducted by Moshe Paranov, director of the school, and Elmer Nagy acts as stage director and designer. Up to 1949 they had given about one hundred performances of more than twenty operas, seven of which were televised by the General Electric Company in Schenectady.

Also in 1942, the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston revived its long tradition of an opera school by organizing an opera department under Boris Goldovsky. And in 1943 the Baldwin-Wallace Conservatory of Music at Berea, Ohio, followed with the establishment of its opera workshop. One full-length opera or two chamber operas are produced each year, plus performances of operatic excerpts. The original idea of the Berea workshop stemmed from Leonard Treash, who in 1947 became director of the opera department of the Eastman School of Music in Rochester.

In Philadelphia the Curtis Institute of Music maintains its traditional opera department, and the Academy of Vocal Arts, devoted exclusively to the training of singers, has a dramatic class under stage director Rose Landver which gives regular opera performances.

Other training places in Philadelphia are the Conservatory of Music, the Musical Academy, and Ornstein's School of Music. The "School for Opera" in that city was credited with the first performance in English of Jacques Ibert's *Angelique*.

Other well-established conservatories that continue to train for opera in classes and actual performances are the Peabody Institute in Baltimore; the Cleveland Institute of Music; the American Conservatory of Music and the Cosmopolitan School of Music in Chicago; and the Conservatories of Cincinnati, St. Louis, Indianapolis, Nashville, Kansas City, and Portland. In Chicago there are also an opera department at the Chicago Musical College and an opera workshop at the Roosevelt College of Music, owner of the old Auditorium Building which is still treasured by the city's music lovers.

The Los Angeles Conservatory of Music and Arts began to produce full-length operas in 1947; and in 1948 its operatic activities came under Wolfgang Martin's direction. In Canada the Halifax Bicentenary in 1949 saw the successful foundation of the Halifax Conservatory Opera Group under Mariss Vetra.

## IN THE SCHOOLS

In New York City the Juilliard School of Music has had an opera department since 1929, and in 1947 it organized the Juilliard Opera Theatre headed by Frederic Cohen with Frederic Waldman as conductor and Frederick Kiesler as stage designer. They prepare two major productions a year and these are presented to the public, as a rule in four performances each, in the well-equipped Juilliard opera theater, holding 1000 seats. Additional performances are presented on a more informal basis. All the operas are done in English and great attention is paid to instruction in diction under the supervision of Madeleine Marshall.

A seminar for operatic stage directors and coaches has also been made part of the Juilliard Opera Theatre. In recent years it has produced several modern operas, among them Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex* in 1948.

The opera department at the New York College of Music, founded as early as 1904, gives three or four performances of one opera annually. And the David Mannes Music School, also of New York City, has had an opera department since 1940 and in recent years has given several fine performances of Mozart operas under the musical direction of Carl Bamberger, conductor, and Ralph Herbert, stage director. For their production of *Don Giovanni* Richard Rychtarik provided an effective yet inexpensive background by projecting painted slides from the rear of the stage onto screens made of plastic.

Besides these, the Manhattan School of Music and the music school of the Henry Street Settlement, founded in 1936, have performed operas. There are also the Rossini, Young Artists', and Master Institute opera workshops. And in the Juilliard Concert Hall the Kathryn Long Fund, connected with the Metropolitan Opera, sponsored its first performance under the direction of Dino Yannopoulos in 1949. This program of three one-act operas, using mostly young Metropolitan singers, points the way, perhaps, toward a Metropolitan opera workshop in the future.

Finally, there are the opera performances staged by the students of individual teachers or studio schools: for instance, those performed by John Seagle's Colony Opera Guild, which gives three operas every summer at Schroon Lake, New York; those by the pupils of Senia and Maria Hussa-Greve at the Sherwood Music School and of the Raisa-Rimini School in Chicago; of Victor Fuchs in Hollywood; of the



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

Philips Opera Group in Boise, Idaho, which developed from a private voice school; of Josephine La Puma's Mascagni Opera Guild in New York, which gives a great number of student performances each year.

We should mention, too, the fact that an increasing number of high schools are giving operas. According to *Opera News*, sixteen high schools had performed opera in some form during the year from October 15, 1948, to October 15, 1949. The operas, all sung in English, were *Down in the Valley* at twelve schools, *Carmen* at two, *Aida* at one, and *The Bartered Bride* at one.<sup>2</sup>

All in all—and this survey is by no means complete—America is witnessing a very heartening mobilization of educational forces to create new places and ways for the study of opera and the practical training of young artists.

In many respects, these school experiments provide the only field where modern opera production methods can be adequately applied. Comparatively free from the handicaps of insufficient financial sponsorship and union restrictions that often weigh heavily on grand opera and community companies, school opera is able to devote the necessary effort and rehearsal time to the preparation of performances.

Fifty to seventy stage rehearsals for one opera are not unusual. Indiana University reports about sixty stage rehearsals for one opera (thirty with piano and marked scenery, twenty-four with orchestra, six full dress, and twelve lighting rehearsals). The Julius Hartt School reports forty to sixty (thirty with piano and marked scenery, six with orchestra, five full dress, and fourteen lighting rehearsals). Toronto's Opera School averages seventy; Baylor University in Texas, eighty. Such figures fill professional opera directors with envy.

Also, since the Damocles sword of the box office does not hang over the head of the director of a school opera department or workshop, he need not restrict his choice of repertoire to proven stand-bys like *Carmen* and *Bohème*. With grand opera of the *Aida* and *Tristan* type at least excluded, because of the students' youthful voices, he can turn to classic operas of the eighteenth century, or can experiment with contemporary works.

The operas most frequently encountered in the reports I received from various school groups are Pergolesi's *Maid as Mistress*, Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*, John Gay's *Beggar's Opera*, and Mozart's works.

## IN THE SCHOOLS

The Gilbert and Sullivan light operas that formerly were so predominant are still often performed, but their number has decreased decidedly in favor of comparatively simple operas. Still more obvious is the quick rise in the production of modern operas. The repertoire of today's school opera groups includes not only Kurt Weill's *Down in the Valley*, written for this purpose, but also operas by Menotti, Benjamin Britten, Virgil Thomson, Douglas Moore, Ernst Bacon, and Hindemith's *There and Back* (*Hin und zurück*).

Only on school stages is the American composer given a chance to gain experience in the operatic medium. It is not at all mere coincidence that the three greatest successes among new operas in America during recent years—Britten's *Peter Grimes*, Menotti's *The Medium*, and Kurt Weill's *Down in the Valley*—were premièred at opera workshops in American schools of music.

The same opportunity is given for unhampered application of other elements of modern operatic production. Opera in English, opposed in the field of grand opera and debated in community opera, has been unanimously accepted by school opera. Also, because of the often limited size of school theaters and the fact that at a university the director and designer of the drama department are often in charge of the staging, grand opera routine gives way to original production methods. Intimate facial expression and real acting take the place of grandiloquent, stylized gestures, and scenery, costumes, and lighting emphasize the significant points of the drama. Finally, many American school theaters, such as those of Indiana and Stanford universities and that of the Berkshire Music Center, have well-equipped stages which make modern productions possible.

It is in the workshops of American schools, more than anywhere else, that the agents and tools for the new opera are being prepared: composers, singers, directors, production methods. But one big question remains unanswered: Where are the many young operatic artists to find their professional outlets?

They all have their eye on the Metropolitan, of course, but it can absorb only a few of them. Those who do not find a foothold in the few larger community opera companies—and even those who do can scarcely make a living from their limited engagements—must turn to work in churches, concerts, choruses, or schools. Some find employment in radio. But such engagements are merely substitutes for the

## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

operatic stage toward which their ambitions were directed. Only a great number of permanent opera companies can give them the positions they have trained for. Unless, perhaps, the new technical media—motion pictures and television—develop in a fashion that will bring the fulfillment of their hopes.

# OPERA

## *in motion pictures*

**ON BROADWAY**, in the community, and in the schools, even with modern production methods and contemporary works in the repertoire, opera still remains within the traditional theater concept of legitimate opera as our fathers and forefathers knew it: the audience goes to attend the performance in the opera house. But in the new media of motion picture and television this tradition is being reversed: the opera comes to its audience, in or near their homes.

This development carries within itself social and economic implications of tremendous import. The privileges of wealth and education, formerly preponderant in the world of opera, are being negated by the new inventions. Attendance at movie theaters is within the reach of almost everyone, and television performances, either by way of "live" shows or on film, are being transmitted without charge.

One night's audience at the opera might number 1000 in Vienna, 1600 in Paris, 3200 to 3500 in Milan or New York, 9000 in Cleveland, and 20,000 at the Hollywood Bowl. But a motion picture or television performance of opera can be, and is, witnessed by millions.



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

Until now the budgeting for grand opera has been based on potential audiences calculated by multiplying the number of seats in the opera house by the average number of performances. At the Metropolitan this, as a rule, means a total audience for one opera (six or eight performances) of about 25,000 people annually. But at the very first telecast from the Metropolitan stage (in 1948) Verdi's *Otello* was seen and heard by at least ten times as many people as had witnessed all its fifty-three previous performances since its opening in 1883. Even the Met's most popular opera, *Aida* (345 performances between 1883 and the end of the 1948-49 season), would, if sold out, have been attended by about 1,200,000 people, which is still fewer than the estimated television audience for this opera telecast.

And we are only at the beginning of television. Today's opera producer can expect in the future to put on a single performance that will be seen simultaneously in millions of homes and also in hundreds of television theaters at movie prices. He can therefore hope to present a production of maximum quality to a maximum number of spectators at profits hitherto undreamed of in the operatic world.

Motion pictures and television also promise, in fact demand, new methods of production resulting from the advantages and the limitations of camera technique. These involve the use of multiple sets, close-ups, montage, and numerous other effects as yet unknown in operatic production.

Out of these three revolutionary aspects of the new media—the social, economic, and technical aspects—is bound to arise a new artistic concept of opera and its production. This concept will take into account the basic problems of plot, musical form, the importance of the word, and the question of English, as well as casting, acting, scenery, costumes, lighting, theater-building, and the training of the artists.

The outlook, then, for the modernization of opera in these new technical forms of presentation is complex but stimulating and hopeful.

The process of bringing opera to the American home began, of course, with the advent of radio and of improved phonograph recordings. But while these media have interested millions of new friends in opera, they cannot be considered full substitutes for an operatic performance, for they omit one essential aspect of it, the visual reproduction. In the usual broadcast of opera, little attempt is made to

## IN MOTION PICTURES

compensate for this loss by means of special radio adaptations, beyond a short description of the story by a commentator before each act. Thus only the auditory values reach the radio audience, and these are usually further diminished by the use of a foreign language. It is the motion picture and television, both of which combine sight and sound, that can transmit the full aspects of opera.

It seems obvious beyond dispute that the motion picture is an ideal medium for the production of opera. Far more than the legitimate theater, opera has always called for scenic imagination and showmanship, making use to the fullest of rapidly changing scenery, mass spectacle, and all sorts of miracle devices to suggest the legendary and the supernatural. The visual variety of film seems made to order for operas that contain many different scenes—*The Magic Flute* and *Oberon*, for example—and for Wagner's visions of swimming Rhine maidens, riding Valkyries, fierce dragons, swan boats, and the awesome flames of a magic fire.

Yet, for all this promise of a perfect mating, the record of opera in the movies has been on the whole disappointing; the possibilities of the medium remain largely unachieved still. In fact, American picture producers today seem even more reluctant than their predecessors to risk the filming of opera. Nonetheless, great potentialities remain inherent in the relationship between musical drama and the motion picture, and circumstances may someday bring about their realization.

[ It was not until 1927, when Warner Brothers' production of *The Jazz Singer* with Al Jolson started the development of "talking pictures," that the full technical means for recording any kind of "musical" on film were available. So it is surprising to find a relatively large number of operas appearing on the film lists during the years of silent pictures. Almost from the beginning of the industry at the turn of the century, parts of operatic scores were synchronized with the story told in pictures on the screen. ]

As early as 1905 Pathé produced a film version of *Faust*—which, however, followed Goethe more than Gounod. The year 1909 saw two different versions of *Rigoletto*, one made in France and one in the United States. The latter, entitled *The Duke's Jester*, used Victor Hugo's original book and Verdi's music produced by Vitagraph. The same year produced a *Parsifal* made by America's Edison.

In 1910 two versions of *Carmen* appeared, one by Pathé and the

## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

other, *The Cigarette Maker of Seville*, by Edison. These started off the long list of film presentations of the Carmen story, which by 1948 had reached the number of sixteen. Most of them were based on Mérimée's novel rather than on the libretto of the opera, but they all used Bizet's music. In 1915 Cecil B. DeMille produced *Carmen* with Geraldine Farrar, who had been imported by Lasky Features from the Metropolitan Opera. The same year Fox competed with another *Carmen* featuring one of Hollywood's biggest stars up to that time, Theda Bara, "The Vamp." Other *Carmen* pictures were Chaplin's burlesque entitled *Gypsy Blood*, made in Germany with Pola Negri under the direction of Ernst Lubitch; *The Loves of Carmen* with Dolores Del Rio released by Fox in 1927; and a French film the following year.

*Manon* was filmed at least four times during the period of the silent picture: in 1910 by Pathé; in 1914 as *Manon Lescaut* with Lina Cavalieri and Lucien Muratore in a four-reel film by the Playgoers Film Company; in 1926 by UFA in Germany; and in 1927 by Warner Brothers under the title *When a Man Loves*.

In 1910 Pathé produced a film version of *Il Trovatore*; in 1911 Edison made *Aïda*; Glinka's opera *A Life for the Czar* appeared in Russia in 1911; *Parsifal* was filmed in Italy in 1912, as was *The Marriage of Figaro* the following year.

Mary Pickford was featured in a Paramount film of *Madame Butterfly* in 1915 and the dancer Anna Pavlova in *The Dumb Girl of Portici* in 1916. The same year brought another *Rigoletto* film under the title of *Fool's Revenge*. Mary Garden's *Thaïs* came in 1917, and a *Tosca* film with Farrar in 1918. In 1926 King Vidor produced *La Bohème* with Lillian Gish in a motion picture that was called "virtually flawless and one that will do its share to bring the screen to a higher plane."<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately this adaptation of Murger's novel, because of copyright questions, had to appear without Puccini's music.

For Fritz Lang's great *Nibelungen* film, made in Germany, parts of Wagner's music were used, and Ludwig Berger produced a German film based on *Die Meistersinger*.

The list of silent films using opera stories and scores closes with a version of *Der Rosenkavalier* made for the screen under the composer's supervision in 1926. To the request that he write special music for the scenario, Richard Strauss replied that "he would reverse the

## IN MOTION PICTURES

process and write a film for his music, allowing the spirit of the music to suggest appropriate action for the screen." Strauss wrote out his ideas for the film director, carefully timing the action with a metronome. The complete work is said to have effected "a new harmony in sight and sound which introduced a new era both in the musical and the film world."<sup>2</sup>

The advent of sound in motion pictures increased the demand for opera and its singers. Lawrence Tibbett, engaged from the Metropolitan by M-G-M, scored a great success in *The Rogue Song* (1930), and Grace Moore joined him in his next film, *The Moon*. The *Pagliacci* of 1930, performed by Fortuno Gallo's San Carlo Opera Company, drew significant comment from *Variety*:

"This is the first time grand opera has been screened in its entirety. It won't make money, but it is an important experiment because Gallo didn't turn *Pagliacci* into a moving picture. He merely screened the opera. It stops at the end of the first act and starts again with the second. The orchestra plays its prelude to each act, etc. . . . The customers present enjoyed the film and accepted it in the spirit of a regular opera, applauding the arias as if they had been sung in person. . . . A marked deficiency is that the sound is poor, ground noises at all times being audible. Performance itself is quite up to the mark. Fact that it is made in Italian doesn't matter to American audiences since no one can understand opera librettis anyway. An interesting experiment and ought to allow its makers to break even."<sup>3</sup>

But the *New York Times* did not agree on the language question: "The possibilities of the sound film opera as a missionary force in popularizing opera in towns and cities away from large musical centers are unlimited. The production last night was in Italian and though the diction was unusually clear, it must be asked what a foreign language would mean to an audience to whom even opera is something novel? If we are to have sound film operas for the masses, why not in English?"<sup>4</sup>

In 1932 Paramount repeated the success of its silent *Madame Butterfly* by adding sound and using Sylvia Sidney and Cary Grant in the leading roles. Two years later Grace Moore scored a real hit in the Columbia film *One Night of Love*, in which she sang several operatic arias.

By that time opera in Hollywood seemed to be well on its way. Lily



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

Pons was signed for three films by RKO, Cecil DeMille announced ambitious plans for screen performances of grand opera, Mary Garden was engaged in an advisory position by Metro, and full productions of Verdi's and Puccini's operas were under discussion at Culver City. The motion picture experts were sure that the Metropolitan Opera need not worry about its future; Hollywood would take good care of that. One of them wrote:

"What of the Metropolitan Opera in relation to that alleged common enemy of mankind, technology? Will the machine in the form of motion picture and radio help or hurt? While the music temple at Broadway and Fortieth Street has been fighting with its back to the wall, opera has swept triumphantly over the air waves and across the screen. . . . The ultimate effect on the fortunes of the Opera House on Broadway should be highly favorable. A great public is being introduced to opera and its New York shrine, including the diamond horse-shoe. Pessimists say the result will be to make people stay at home and turn on the radio or go to the neighborhood movie. Optimists are nearer the truth when they argue that people who have made the acquaintance of screen and radio opera will want to see the real thing. A good many out-of-town visitors who have never before included the Metropolitan in their sightseeing plans will learn to do so. Most of them will wear tails and a white tie."<sup>5</sup>

But the enthusiasm about the golden future for opera in Hollywood was somewhat premature, to say the least. For, curiously enough, the production of full-fledged grand opera, fairly frequent before, stopped soon after the invention of sound pictures.

About all the producers did thereafter was use operatic arias here and there, as in *Metropolitan*, Darryl Zanuck's tale of a young American singer, starring Lawrence Tibbett; or film successful light operas with Jeanette MacDonald and Nelson Eddy; or adapt operatic material for slapstick purposes as in Laurel and Hardy's *The Devil's Brother* (based on Auber's *Fra Diavolo*), the same team's *Bohemian Girl*, and the Marx brothers' *A Night at the Opera*. Legitimate opera was used only in homeopathic doses in the form of interpolated arias sung by Metropolitan artists: Martinelli, Gigli, Schumann-Heink, de Luca, Martini, Swarthout, Bori, Flagstad, Melton, Kullman, Jepson, Stevens, and others.

In contrast with this situation in the United States, a great number

## IN MOTION PICTURES

of operatic pictures were produced in Europe during the two decades following the invention of sound films. And most of them were imported for showing to American audiences.

The list begins with the first *Carmen* film using sound, made in England in 1931, using the title *Gypsy Blood* and featuring Marguerite Namara. The same year Auber's *Fra Diavolo* was filmed in Italy. Smetana's *Bartered Bride*, with Jarmila Novotna (1932), and Flotow's *Martha* (1936), under the title of *Letzte Rose* (Last Rose), were made in Germany.

In 1936 the French film industry contributed *Le Barbier de Seville*, which compressed Rossini's *Barber of Seville* and Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro* into a musical of only one hour and twenty-five minutes in length. Also in 1936, *La Bohème* appeared in France under the title *Mimi* with Gertrude Lawrence and Douglas Fairbanks Jr. and in Germany as *The Charm of Bohème* with Jan Kiepura and Martha Eggerth singing the leading roles.

A *Pagliacci* film starring Richard Tauber was produced in England in 1937; it kept strictly to the story of the opera and used practically its entire score. And just before the outbreak of World War II, Grace Moore sang the lead in a film version of Charpentier's *Louise* made in Paris. In this adaptation, made under the composer's own supervision, most of the operatic recitatives were changed into dialogue.

After the war America's importation of foreign films was resumed. Although another *Bohème* (*La Vie de Bohème*) came from France, parts of a *Rigoletto* from Russia, and a humorless *Fledermaus* from Germany, it was now Italy that provided the biggest list of operatic films. Many of them were lacking in technical quality, but others pointed the way to the future.

We can divide these Italian films into two categories: those that reproduced the operas more or less as they are seen in legitimate stage performances, and those that attempted to interpret the operatic material in the special terms of the screen medium.

To the first group belong *The Barber of Seville* with Corradi, Tagliavini, Gobbi, and Tajo; *Lucia di Lammermoor*, *L'Elisir d'Amore*, *Il Trovatore*, and condensed versions of *Don Pasquale*, *William Tell*, *Carmen*, and other operas which were shown in America under the title *First Opera Film Festival*. These Italian-language films rarely go beyond a documentary approach and often use some well-known Ameri-

## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

can musical authority—usually Deems Taylor, Olin Downes, or Milton Cross—to furnish a commentary in English. Among these pictures a *Rigoletto* directed by Carmine Gallone, with Gobbi in the title role, is remarkable for the fact that it uses the entire score of the opera, conducted by Tullio Serafin.

In the second group belong several other operatic films directed by Carmine Gallone. *The Dream of Butterfly*, with Maria Cebotari in the leading role, presents a condensed version of the opera as part of a modern love story. It tells of a tragic romance between an opera singer and a pianist. The pianist goes to America leaving the singer—as the American officer leaves Butterfly in the opera—with a promise of marriage and a child. The operatic sequences are performed as a play within the play and their use in authentic form seems properly motivated.

Next came a film version of Puccini's *Manon Lescaut* in which the title role was played by Alida Valli and the arias were sung by Maria Caniglia and Gigli. The critical comment was yes and no: "None of the visible cast sings at all. Thus the director was able to choose his cast for appearance and acting ability rather than singing talent. If you have seen opera stars act, you will realize that a great improvement has been made. However, the picture moves very slowly. The only sources of satisfaction were the musical accompaniment by Puccini and the striking beauty of Manon."<sup>6</sup>

Using once again the play-within-play device, Gallone directed a modern version of Puccini's *Tosca* with a title drawn from the last words of the heroine in the second act, *Before Him All Rome Trembled*. The parallel between the resistance to Scarpia's dictatorship in the opera and recent political events in Rome, as well as the world success of Anna Magnani and the Italian resistance movement in the film *Open City*, suggested the idea for the script, in which a group of Italian opera singers defy the Nazis while giving a performance of *Tosca*. The final singing of Cavaradossi's "Victoria!" is addressed to the Allied troops in the opera house, who have just liberated Rome.

Gallone also directed a film version of *La Traviata* which Gregor Rabinovitch produced in Rome for Columbia Pictures. It was shown in America under the title of *The Lost One*. In the frame story used to provide continuity and comment for the parts sung in Italian, a

## IN MOTION PICTURES

diary of Alphonsine Plessis, the original model for the lady of the camellias, is given to Verdi by the author Dumas at the lady's tomb in Montmartre cemetery. The reading of this book furnishes an organic narration in English throughout the film.

As in the *Tosca* film, only the tenor both acts and sings in *The Lost One*; in all the other roles the two activities are divided between actors and singers. The fine quality of the *Traviata* film, which was made with American equipment and ample funds, seems to be marred only by a certain disunity that comes from combining two languages, separating actors from singers, and adding the device of a narrator voice.

In 1948 Rabinovitch produced in Rome a screen version of *Faust* with Italo Tajo as Mephistopheles. For this he adapted Goethe's story and used music by Gounod, Berlioz, and Boito. A *Pagliacci* film made in Italy under the title *Ridi, Pagliaccio* (Laugh, Clown), with Valli and Gigli, uses the reportedly true story of the clown's life to motivate the operatic treatment. And in 1950 Gian-Carlo Menotti went to Rome to direct a picture version of *The Medium* to be acted and sung by American artists.

Among other Italian postwar films are two that are based on the original stories and use the music of the operas merely as background. These are *The King's Jester*, a film version of Victor Hugo's *Le Roi s'amuse* with music from Verdi's *Rigoletto*, and a French-language *Carmen* produced in Rome with Viviane Romance playing the gypsy girl. Certain changes had to be made before this picture could be shown in America, because the National Legion of Decency objected to the original's "very immodestly suggestive costuming; free love; suggestive situations; fatalism in theme; and irreverent references to religious matters."

In 1950 the British film industry, after its great success with the ballet picture *Red Shoes*, produced an interesting version of *The Tales of Hoffmann*.

In addition, several motion pictures were made in Europe dealing with the lives of famous composers and containing operatic sequences. Among these were three Mozart films: one produced in England with selections of the composer's music conducted by Sir Thomas Beecham; an Austrian picture, *Mozart Story*, to which several new scenes were added in Hollywood; and one made in Italy under Gallone's direction,



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

which was presented in America as *Eternal Melodies*. There were also Italian films on the lives of Verdi and Rossini, and a French one about Offenbach.

On the whole, although hampered by inferior camera technique and sound equipment as well as by budget limitations, opera in film blossomed profusely in postwar Europe.

All the more conspicuous, then, is the American industry's failure to put a single full-fledged opera on the screen since Paramount's *Madame Butterfly* in 1932. Hollywood's only attempt at a feature film with an operatic subject, *The Loves of Carmen* with Rita Hayworth in 1948, was a far cry from the opera—and this not only because Bizet's music was missing.

True, in 1950 M-G-M made a motion picture of the life of Caruso and of course had to use a good many operatic excerpts, sung by Mario Lanza in the title role and several Metropolitan artists in supporting parts. But not even the life story of the famous tenor could be told as it was; it had to undergo the usual Hollywood "rectifications."

What has been the reason for Hollywood's shying away from opera? Hardly dislike of its music, for the number of operatic arias interpolated in musical films has not diminished. Grand opera stars like Melchior and Pinza have joined their Metropolitan colleagues in Hollywood and the producers have used their operatic "numbers" as welcome garnishes in the menus of numerous "musicals."

Joseph Pasternak is one who has employed opera singers and opera excerpts regularly as part of a successful picture formula, but he has made sure that they remained incidental to a general story line of Hollywood's own devising. That the result has little connection with opera became obvious to me when I staged some operatic sequences sung by Lauritz Melchior for a Pasternak film at M-G-M in 1946. For reasons that will presently be clear, I refrain from giving the title of the picture, which was commercially successful.

One of the scenes showed Melchior as Otello in the second act of Verdi's opera singing his aria, "Ora e per sempre addio," as part of a stage performance. We carefully imitated an authentic operatic set and did our best to arrange the action so that Melchior's fine work could be photographed to advantage from the front of the stage. The director

## IN MOTION PICTURES

had innumerable shots made from this point, and I paid little attention to the fact that others were being taken from the side wings of the stage.

Months later I went to a New York movie theater to get my first view of the completed picture. Only then did I discover that it was the side-wing shots which served the main purpose of the script: to show the young man who played Melchior's son in the story calling his opera-singing father off the stage during the performance for very private motives. Consequently, practically none of the shots taken from the front, showing Otello's action "straight," had been used; the movie audience saw only those that showed the son waiting in the wings or the father as seen by his son from backstage—with all the visual disillusion such a view of the stage offers. When I saw this scene on the screen, I ran out of the theater in angry disappointment and have made no attempt since to see the rest of the film.

The chief reason for Hollywood's reluctant attitude toward true opera on film lies principally in its producers' fear that the realistic formula which they consider the key to their financial success cannot be reconciled with the style of opera. They are afraid that continuous singing would seem unreal to a motion picture audience untrained in operatic tradition and accustomed to photographic naturalism.

They may be right if one thinks only in terms of the usual American movie. But consider the success of various films which have used music on a different emotional level, such as Walt Disney's *Snow White* and his and Stokowski's *Fantasia*. There is also Lawrence Olivier's *Henry V*, which uses music by William Walton to create a poetic atmosphere that makes Shakespeare's verse "natural" to the movie audience. And, similarly pointing to the future, many operatic composers have written or are writing music for motion pictures. Among these are, or have been, Auric, Ibert, Korngold, Honegger, Milhaud, Poulenc, Shostakovich, Strauss, Toch, Walton, Weill, and Williams from Europe; Antheil, Copland, Gershwin, Gruenberg, Hageman, and Thomson from America.

To assess the probable future of opera in motion pictures one must take into account the growing enthusiasm for opera throughout the United States, the recent film versions of opera from Europe, and the earlier history of opera in American movies, as well as the increasing use of operatic arias and scenes in Hollywood musicals, the many

## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

actual or potential opera composers who have become familiar with the task of writing music for pictures, and, far from least, the latent technical affinity of this medium for opera.

The motion picture can be a powerful ally in making millions of new friends for opera among people who have hitherto had no access to it and hence no interest in it. Opera on the screen can serve the purpose of entertainment as well as education, and it can be a contemporary and independent work of art as well as a documentary facsimile of stage productions past and present.

# OPERA

## *in television*

**RADIO**, unable to transmit the visual with the aural, can do only half a job or less in broadcasting any form of musical drama, but it has proved an ideal medium for the popularization of concert music. Television, on the other hand, necessarily combining sight with sound, scarcely knows what to do with music alone.

So far the chief purpose of the concertgoer, listening to the inner content of the music, has largely been frustrated in telecast performances. In the concert hall the listener observes orchestra, conductor, and soloists from a distance and so the gestures of the artists who execute the music conform with its meaning—or at least rarely distort that meaning. But in television the close-ups of the performing musicians reveal details that more often detract from the musical content than enhance it. The gestures and facial expressions of some conductors and players may reflect the interpretation of the work, but those of others, interesting in themselves perhaps, may produce the opposite effect.

In a radio broadcast of Wagner's *Siegfried Idyll*, for instance, the listener hearing the beautiful passages of the solo violin and the individual woodwind instruments can make his own imaginary picture of



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

the romantic peace and the twittering birds in the deep forest; but in one telecast of this work that I witnessed the close-ups of the musicians' somber, bespectacled faces diminished the possibility of any such poetic illusion.

Frequent switches from camera to camera, each directed onto the performer from a different position, cause further distractions by abruptly shifting the spectator's viewing point in a way that is especially confusing on the comparatively small television screen.

Such difficulties in telecasting concerts are hardly avoidable, unless the camera is to remain fixed in the position of a concert listener and the producer contents himself with merely supplying introductory comments. Or he might provide a visual background for the music appropriate to its style—for instance, by placing an interpreter of Bach's sacred music in the setting of a church of the composer's period.

A third solution of the problem might be the dramatization of concert music by visual illustration of its content. For Stephen Foster's "Old Folks at Home," for example, cotton fields, rivers, darkies, plantation houses, could all be shown on film or in still pictures. Or the music might be illustrated in some such surrealist fashion as we saw in the film *Fantasia*.

But here again we tread on delicate ground, since it is the happy privilege of the concert listener to let his mind make its own interpretation. Some might fully share the Stokowski-Disney portrayal of Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony* in terms of a Greek landscape with Nereids and Tritons, whereas this is strange to me who happen to know the different character of the landscape around Vienna that inspired Beethoven to compose this pastoral idyl.

The use of the kaleidoscope to reproduce changing abstract forms and colors is another method of providing visual images to accompany concert music on the video screen.

But all these attempts at "staging" concert music must in the end remain arbitrary and imposed because the music was not originally conceived for this purpose, and it will require producer-directors of real musicianship and taste to handle this delicate and yet necessary task.

Whatever its troubles with concert music, television comes into its own as a medium for transmitting all forms of musical-dramatic art: vaudeville, musical comedy, ballet, light opera, and grand opera.

## IN TELEVISION

The New York newspapers of November 26, 1948, carried this announcement: "Television will cover the opening performance of the Metropolitan Opera Association's season Monday night, marking the first transmission of an opera in its entirety by that medium."

This was interesting but not quite true. General Electric's television station WRGB in Schenectady, New York, had telecast a studio performance of *Hänsel and Gretel* by the opera department of the Julius Hartt School of Music in Hartford, Connecticut, on December 23, 1942, and the credit for being the first complete opera televised in America goes to that performance, although it was done to a two-piano accompaniment.

At any rate, the Metropolitan's presentation of Verdi's *Otello* on November 29, 1948, can claim the distinction of being the first complete grand opera performance to be telecast from any operatic stage, and its great implications for the future were immediately recognized.

The event occurred in a critical period in the history of the Metropolitan, as did the first radio broadcast from the Metropolitan stage on Christmas Day 1931. Then the financial crisis resulting from the depression was relieved by the advent two years later of commercial sponsorship of opera on the air. Now, at the opening of the 1948-49 season, which had been on the verge of being canceled in a similar crisis, television made its debut in the opera house, raising high hopes for the future.

That night the Metropolitan's audience swelled from 3800 in the theater to an estimated two million. The video broadcast by the American Broadcasting Company from its WJZ-TV station in New York City was seen simultaneously in six cities along the eastern seaboard—Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington, Richmond—which were connected by coaxial cable. Plans to reach other stations all across the country to the West Coast did not materialize because the Kinescope film that was made did not prove satisfactory.

It was not to be expected that the numerous artistic and technical problems involved in this huge experiment would be solved in this first telecast. There were such questions as where best to place the eight cameras (three in the auditorium and one on the stage for the actual performance, four more to view the opening night audience in the front of the house); how to adapt and cue the lighting, including the infrared light which illuminates dark scenes for the eye of the camera

## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

but not for the public in the auditorium; how to coordinate the handling of the cameras and the musical action on the stage.

But despite its imperfections, the telecast clearly demonstrated the importance of the new medium for opera, as Jack Gould pointed out in the *New York Times*: "What the acquisition of a mass following may mean for opera almost exceeds the bounds of the imagination in its challenging and provocative implications. Last Monday night the main news of the opening of *Otello* was not to be found on Thirty-ninth Street; it was in the individual television home."<sup>1</sup>

To those of us concerned with staging the performance the telecast also demonstrated again the urgent need for a new deal in the production of opera. Radio broadcasting has been a helpful ally in keeping the open secret that grand opera at the Metropolitan under existing conditions is primarily a musical affair with the scenic production a secondary consideration. But video laid this secret bare by its most characteristic technical feature, the magnifying eye of the close-up. It brought grand opera, which has been kept at a distance from its audience by huge auditoriums and foreign languages, into more intimate contact with its public than was possible even in the small European theaters for which most of the repertoire operas were written and in which they were originally presented.

The first operatic telecast in America—a performance of the first act of *Pagliacci* conducted by Frank St. Leger with a Metropolitan cast—took place at the NBC–Television studio at Radio City in New York on March 10, 1940. Since that event, and especially after the end of World War II, more experiments had been made in the televising of opera from the studio than is commonly known, since only a small number of television sets (estimated at about 5000) were in use then, and these all within the New York, Philadelphia, and Schenectady area.

The National Broadcasting Company in New York and General Electric's television studio in Schenectady took the lead in the opera field. NBC's first experiment was followed by several General Electric telecasts under Robert B. Stone as producer. These included one-hour versions of Tchaikovsky's operas *Pique Dame* (August 26, 1943) and *Eugen Onegin* (October 8, 1944), both performed in Russian by Pauline Achmatova's Opera Company with a commentary on the plot

## IN TELEVISION

between scenes by the studio announcer. In the first opera the singers wore evening dress and sang to a one-piano accompaniment, but the second production was costumed in its period and a violin and a cello supported the piano.

The same General Electric station produced *Hänsel and Gretel*, Offenbach's *Marriage by Lanternlight* (1943), and *The Frantic Musician* by Gounod (1944), all sung in English by the students of the Julius Hartt School of Music under its directors Moshe Paranov and Elmer Nagy. The station has also televised a number of light operas, among them several by Gilbert and Sullivan.

At NBC-Television in New York during the season of 1944-45 I produced operatic scenes from *La Bohème* and *The Barber of Seville* as well as condensed versions of entire operas: *Carmen*, *Pagliacci*, and *Die Fledermaus*, all in English.

After the three years' interruption of operatic experiments caused by Petrillo's banning of instrumental music in television, Menotti's *The Medium* was televised twice in November and December 1948, first by NBC in Philadelphia and later by CBS-Television in New York. At about the same time the Kraft Television Theatre, over NBC in New York, presented the Co-Opera Company's production of *Hänsel and Gretel* under the musical direction of Sam Morganstern with Stanley J. Quinn Jr. as producer-director. The following year NBC sponsored a telecast of the last act of *La Bohème* with Herman Adler conducting, and CBS produced Menotti's *The Old Maid and the Thief*.

Since 1948 the development of television has been phenomenal. During the twelve months between spring 1948 and spring 1949, 200,000 sets and an audience of about 1,000,000 grew to 1,500,000 sets and an audience of about 6,000,000, and the number of stations jumped from sixteen to sixty-four. With this swift expansion of the field, the telecasting of opera began to spread westward. A full stage performance of *The Tales of Hoffmann* by the Music-Drama Guild was televised in Cincinnati on November 21, 1948, and in Los Angeles, Vladimir Rosing, the artistic director of the American Operatic Laboratory, formed a Music Theater Company which presented opera in condensed form every Sunday over Station KFI-TV.

In 1949 NBC commissioned Menotti to write the first original opera for television, and sponsored a series of one-hour versions of opera in



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

English. And at CBS the Television Opera Theatre under Henry Souvaine and Lawrence Tibbett produced one-hour-and-fifteen-minute versions of *Carmen* in French under Goldovsky and *La Traviata* in English under my direction.

Staging that *Traviata* brought me a good demonstration of the popular appeal of opera in this medium. The morning after the performance my wife happened to go to the Bureau of Motor Vehicles in New York City to apply for a new car license. When the clerk looked at my name on the registration card, he asked, "Was it your husband who put on the opera on television yesterday?"

My wife was astonished. In all my years in legitimate opera houses she had never heard of such recognition accorded to an operatic stage director. And when she returned home to our village and found that the butcher had also seen the telecast and was prepared to favor her with a choice steak because of my connection with it, my standing at home rose perceptibly.

This continuing experimentation has taught us quite a few things about the special problems and techniques of opera in television—in all its three forms: the telecasting (1) of an actual theater performance, (2) of a studio production, and (3) of a film.

The *Otello* telecast from the Metropolitan stage revealed some of the advantages and disadvantages of the first form. First of all, it permits what neither film nor studio production can achieve: the instantaneous participation of the spectator in the actual performance. And this advantage offsets many of the artistic and technical difficulties which this type of telecasting encounters in the present-day situation of our grand opera companies.

In this respect conditions at the *Otello* performance were rather more favorable than usual, for this opera is an unusually strong drama that forces the singers to act, the familiarity of the plot helps the listener to understand it without knowledge of Italian, and, this being the opening night of the season, the actual performance was preceded by two complete rehearsals with scenery, lights, costumes, and make-up which the video engineers could use for their technical preparations. Such rehearsals are rarely possible in the course of the season, except, of course, for new productions. Lack of them does not particularly

## IN TELEVISION

bother the radio technicians, but it would prove a serious handicap in television.

In any case, as long as the costs of television are high, as long as the scenic standards of grand opera production are not better than they generally are, and as long as opera theaters, stages, and production methods are not laid out with television equipment and techniques in mind, there is no use in dreaming of ideal conditions for telecasts from the opera house. It will be more useful to try to do the basic things that are possible even under the given circumstances. These are the choice of appropriate, dramatically interesting operas; good casting; providing enough rehearsals at least to ensure the proper placing of the cameras; making certain adjustments in the appearance, placing, action, costuming, and make-up of the artists; ensuring control of the lighting; and arranging the integration of the camera work with the score and action. These efforts are indispensable if television is not to present opera falsely as the remote, "highbrow" art many people still believe it to be, rather than as the fascinating musical drama it can be.

We should add that the telecast of *Der Rosenkavalier*, the Metropolitan opening in 1949, and also of *Don Carlo* in 1950 showed definite technical improvements.

Of the three ways of operatic telecasting, studio production offers the best chance of realizing both virtues of television: participation of the spectator in the actual performance and use of the new artistic and technical production methods inherent in the new medium. I should like to discuss these on the basis of my personal experience.

When I did my first work at NBC-Television in New York during the summer of 1944, television was still a very small field, there was no sale of time to commercial sponsors, and good will was high among the little group of pioneering directors and engineers. I had joined the television department as "Director of Operatic Production" at the suggestion of President David Sarnoff and was assigned my work by NBC's pioneer "showman," John F. Royal.

I still remember the incredulous faces of the engineers when I was introduced to them at my first visit to the small studio 3-H. A stage director of the Met, from Vienna, to do opera! This combination was obviously hard to take for men who knew the entertainment industry well. But they were willing to give me a fair chance.

## · OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

My first task was to produce a 13-minute scene from an opera. The idea, of course, was that in that future so much hoped for this would make a salable 15-minute program, with a one-minute "commercial" before and after the opera excerpt. I proposed the scene between Rudolph and Mimi which forms the second half of Act I of *La Bohème*. It is a little unit by itself, a "boy meets girl" love scene that can be understood without much further knowledge of the rest of the opera.

To begin our production we used a model of the proscenium arch of an opera house stage as a frame for announcing the title of the program, "Scenes from Famous Operas." Then, having in mind the novel by Murger on which *La Bohème* is based, we introduced a book carrying the title of the opera, and, turning the pages, we read the words of the original preface, also printed in the score of the opera, about the carefree life of the Bohemians.

We led into the scene itself by dissolving the book page into a view of the snow-covered rooftops of Paris, which was created by a little papier-mâché model. A part of the design of this model corresponded exactly with the view of Paris which was seen on the backdrop through the window of Rudolph's room, the actual set in which the scene takes place. Camera 2 was used for the model, and Camera 1, which was placed close to the window, was switched to take the backdrop view. Then it "dollied" slowly back, discovering the room and Rudolph sitting at his table trying to write.

He is in a depressed mood. A knock on the door is heard, and he sings "Chi è là?" A woman's voice from outside answers "Scusi." Whereupon Rudolph remarks "Una donna."

The technical director, Albert Protzman, gave me a look in which boredom was mixed with pity. These Italian words meant nothing to him. He came from Hollywood studios, where he was used to working on films in the language of the audience. What could these strange words mean to the average American listening at home to his company's programs? A musical play, telecast not from the Met but from Radio City, in Italian? Obviously it made no sense to him.

I had anticipated this problem and my two young singers, Lois Eastman from Columbia University and John Hamill from the City Center Opera, knew the scene in English as well. So they sang "Who's there?" "Pardon." "It's a lady." This dialogue, sung in the style of the Italian recitative, went on for some time. Before too long I saw

## IN TELEVISION

the faces of the camera men again assuming that uninterested look which is a better gauge than the director's self-deception of the true communicativeness of his production.

"What is it you don't like, Al?" I asked.

"Well, why do they *sing* that stuff? There's no reason to be so excited when he asks 'Do you want a glass of water?' and she says 'Thank you'."

I had no answer to this logical but completely unoperatic approach and we went on with the scene. Only when we reached the moment in which Rudolph finds Mimi's little hand seeking the lost key on the floor in the dark room and he starts to sing the aria, "Your little hand is freezing," did I see warm human interest on the faces of my collaborators.

The next day we repeated the scene. I had been thinking about the opening recitative and had decided to try an experiment. I asked the singers to speak their lines, leaving out the music entirely until they came to the aria. To my surprise, this was not effective either. The mood simply was not there. We now had too little emotional impact where before we had had too much.

At this point the conductor suggested, "Let them speak their lines and I'll play the music underneath the words." We tried it this way and it felt "right." There was just enough emotion vibrating behind the words to carry the tension between the two young people who are feeling the destiny of their first meeting. This was the effect of the "background music" used as it is in the movies.

Later the speaking gradually changed into singing when the conversation rose to the open expression of love. By the end of the scene when the two lovers kiss each other in the moonlight and sing the final phrase, "My love, my own," not only was Mimi's little hand warmer, but so also were our engineers. Opera had won new friends.

From then on, the engineers were personally as well as technically interested in furthering our operatic experiments. We produced a video version of Figaro's aria from *The Barber of Seville* which was staged inside and outside his barbershop. Then we went on to condensed versions of entire operas and light operas. Not wanting to cut a three-hour work to one hour, we presented the plot of *Carmen* in three episodes. For this purpose we took from Mérimée's novel the idea of a story within a story. In the prison after murdering Carmen, Don



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

José tells his tale in three parts, each featuring one of the principal scenes of the opera.

In the last scene, set in front of the arena, a stock film of a bull-fight furnished the mass scenes which could not be staged in the small studio; these were accompanied by the chorus music from the corresponding scenes in the opera. A switch from a poster in the film, announcing the fight, to its facsimile in the studio provided a convincing transition from the celluloid to the "live" set in which the final tragedy took place.

Limitations of space and finance led also to a new solution of the problem of a big operatic orchestra. Instead of subjecting the original orchestral score to a pitiable execution by an insufficient number of players, the conductor made a new "Spanish" instrumentation for a small orchestra, featuring piano, guitar, castanets, and drum.

With all this change our production was not actually Bizet's *Carmen*, of course, but "The Story of Carmen" after Bizet's opera.

When Petrillo forbade the use of instrumental music in television, we did not want to give up our experimental work. So, since the use of commercial recordings was permitted and there is an RCA recording of *Pagliacci* sung by a fine La Scala cast, we prepared a new script using these recordings for the show within the show.

Because Leoncavallo himself stated in the introduction to his opera that an actual incident he knew of had prompted him to choose his subject (and because we were at that time immunized by the success of *Carmen Jones* against any scruples about sticking to the original libretto), we transferred the story of the jealous couple of touring artists to the more contemporary setting of an opera company traveling somewhere in the southern American states. The story was told in spoken English dialogue, the Italian recordings being used only for those situations which were part of the show. In these portions the action was synchronized with the recorded sound.

For this procedure we had plenty of precedent. In making motion pictures the sound track is "pre-recorded" so that the actors when they appear before the cameras can achieve a realistic style of acting unimpeded by facial distortions. And it has long been the hope of producers that the beautiful voices of famous singers who are poor actors can be "dubbed in" in roles played by fine actors who cannot sing. A movie producer once told me in Hollywood that he would someday

## IN TELEVISION

succeed in blending Clark Gable's appearance with a great singer's voice without protest from the artist, the public, or the critics.

I cannot share his conviction, despite the successful separation of singers and actors in some of the European operatic motion pictures described in the preceding chapter. But I do believe that in television good results can sometimes be got by pre-recording the more taxing vocal numbers. In that process the singers can concentrate fully on their musical and vocal problems, and later when they add the action they will be freed of their usual preoccupation with voice production and contact with the conductor. Thus Rudolph in *La Bohème*, for instance, can smilingly caress his beloved Mimi rather than the audience with his high C, and opera singers in general will prove to be better actors than current opinion considers them to be.

In our video version of *Pagliacci*, we found we had to engage young singers for the acting parts in order to achieve the correct synchronization of the recorded sound with their lip movements. Although we were merely trying an experiment necessitated by the musicians' strike, the result provided a surprising proof of the successful use of pre-recording in opera. A leading trade paper criticized the voice of our tenor as being of inferior quality. The critic had not noticed that our "singer's" voice was not his own, but Gigli's!

In all these operatic experiments we made frequent use of the close-up, which in television as in motion pictures, permits the audience to see details of action and particularly facial expression which cannot be detected in the vast spaces of our legitimate opera houses. It was moving to watch Rudolph's fingers touching and holding Mimi's little hand and to see the tears on the artist's face in the prologue of *Pagliacci*.

Even in those early years, when only a small number of receiving sets were in use, we were given proof that opera was to be a "natural" in television. Soldiers in military hospitals in the New York area who had been given television sets and had been asked to write to the company about their reactions, approved enthusiastically of our opera programs.

Those were golden days, not with regard to our income, or the company's, but in the amount of rehearsal and camera time available. The intricate nature of opera productions for telecasting requires weeks of preparation. With no commercial sponsors in television as yet, we

## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

worked in the studio at the rate of nearly one hour of rehearsal per one minute of show time. Although this ratio is now being diminished by the experience acquired and by commercial necessity, a good television production of opera will always be demanding of time and money.

It is for this reason that the third form of telecast opera, opera on film, will be of importance, especially for presentations on stations in smaller communities. The loss of instantaneous experience inherent in film telecasting will be balanced to some extent by the greater possibilities it offers of technical perfection in the performance. However, the use and widespread distribution of such films may be expected to create new problems with the unions because they will be thought sure to reduce the number of local musicians, singers, and technical personnel employed.

The experiments with opera have proved that the very nature of television technique demands production methods which emphasize quality rather than quantity.

To summarize: Successful telecasting of opera calls for realistic handling of the story, including the use of English rather than foreign languages and of dialogue rather than recitative. A physical appearance that fits the role and genuine acting ability are essential criteria in selecting the cast, and a well-coordinated ensemble available for all rehearsals is indispensable. As in the legitimate theater and the motion picture, stars who can keep neither their weight nor their ego in bounds will not be acceptable in television. Careful preparation of "shots" precludes last-minute improvisation, however interesting the performers' personalities may be. Because of the piercing eye of the close-up camera, scenery, costumes, make-up, and lighting must be more realistic in concept, and this will mean replacing some aspects of operatic routine with more up-to-date technical methods similar to those used in motion pictures, though by necessity simpler and quicker to apply.

Theaters and studios must have facilities for placing several different sets to be used in very rapid succession, for handling delicate problems of sound and lighting, for placing the orchestra, and for arranging the proper interrelationship of the singers and the conductor. And to all this must be added the skillful direction of the cameras, including

## IN TELEVISION

the effective application of such technical devices as dissolve and superimposition, stills, films, recordings, and the like.

The integration of all these factors requires producer-directors who are able to master the techniques of both opera and television and combine them to the best advantage for realizing the full possibilities of this new entertainment form.

It is exciting to think of what television can do for the popularization of opera in America. And of how it can open the door to great numbers of American operatic artists—singers, directors, and designers—and encourage the composition of new operas. But it also presents two very real dangers.

The first lies in the general idea of opera as “long-hair” art and the clash of its basic nature with the realism of the American theater and motion picture. The resulting attempts to “rationalize” opera can easily undermine the ground on which it rests. The rules of opera are not those of the stage play or those of radio, and the television camera can easily function merely as a photographic lens instead of as a poetic eye. With too naturalistic an approach, adaptations that in the hands of artists who know what opera is might become effective productions, in the hands of lesser talents can ruin the real quality of opera.

Besides this danger deriving from lack of artistic understanding, another results from the set commercial schedule of 15-, 30-, or 60-minute programs which television has inherited from radio broadcasting. The combination of the “musical theater” approach and the commercial sales formula can make an unholy union for the destruction of basic operatic values.

Opera production for television, therefore, requires sufficient knowledge and ability to strike the proper balance between operatic tradition and modern showmanship, between financial practicabilities and technical possibilities. It must also have a keen eye for new ideas of organization and distribution. The artistic, technical, and economic problems are great, but they fade almost to nothing in comparison with the opportunity of bringing opera to bigger audiences than ever before. For whether by telecasting from the theater, from the studio, or from film, television can be the most decisive medium for forcing opera to take off its top hat and enter the American home.





## **PART THREE • BLUEPRINT FOR THE FUTURE**



# *Toward a people's* OPERA

OUR SURVEY in preceding chapters clearly demonstrates that America has made significant strides toward bringing opera closer to the people.

True, the number of major resident opera companies has not increased, nor have they, beset with continual struggle against inadequate financing, departed to any appreciable extent from the old standard repertoire or from traditional and routine methods of production. But in the decade following the outbreak of World War II the number of smaller community opera groups doubled to reach one hundred and fifty, and more than fifty opera workshops came into being. And of about one hundred operas presented by these groups in the 1947-48 season, more than twenty-five, given some five hundred performances, were by contemporary composers.

Add to this the developments on Broadway and in television and the possibility of real opera in motion pictures, and we have an exciting upsurge of interest and activity that augurs well for the future.

The emergence of a different pattern is discernible in these more recent activities. For one thing, they tend to shun the style of "grand



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

opera" in favor of something more like musical theater. This is partly because the nature of their audiences demands it and partly because economic limitations make it imperative. In any case, the result is a more rationalistic treatment of the plot, reduction in demands on vocal and orchestral quantity, and preference for the use of English.

A second characteristic of the emerging pattern is a new form of sponsorship. Instead of relying as formerly upon huge contributions from a few individuals, today's opera enlists the support of large numbers of donors, guarantors, and guild members who each contribute a relatively small amount. Today even our grand opera companies, like the Metropolitan and those in San Francisco and Cincinnati, are supported in this way, as well as the new community companies in cities like New Orleans, Pittsburgh, Boston, and Fort Worth, Texas.

The companies, those that can, are tapping additional sources of commercial revenue from radio and television, and some of them are getting assistance from municipal recreation or park commissions or from city or county school boards. We even find occasional instances of government aid in the form of free theater space, tax exemption, and—in the cases of San Francisco, New Orleans, and Los Angeles County—direct financial subsidy.

Although in comparison with the sums granted to opera by European units of government, these first American subsidies are pitifully small, ranging from \$4000 to \$25,000 annually, they are important beginnings and reveal a dawning recognition of opera as a legitimate part of general community life.

In order to achieve a reasonable budget and yet keep ticket prices within reach of a large number of people, the newer groups are tending to replace the repertoire system of grand opera companies with the run-of-the-play system of Broadway or at least with a program scheduling a limited number of productions. They do not confine their choice to the standard works, but whenever possible dig into the forgotten treasures of operatic literature or reach out to try something current and new.

Young and enthusiastic, not weighed down with a tradition to live up to or a reputation for splendor to be maintained, these mushrooming opera groups can, and many of them do, make originality and experiment a prime objective in their new productions. From the theater they take over as a matter of course the idea of a coordinated ensemble,

## TOWARD THE FUTURE

achieved by plenty of rehearsals under a unified direction, and they give preference to the singing actor over the singing star. All but a very few of them still lack suitable buildings and up-to-date stage equipment, but they can have newly designed settings that fit the taste of the time and the audience.

This is by no means to say that all these new groups are forward-looking and truly creative in their efforts. Some of them aim at nothing better than to imitate, as closely as their resources permit, the programs and productions of another day and some distant place. These they imagine to be the only "true opera," no matter how unsuited they may be to twentieth-century America. These groups have yet to realize that opera is, must be, a living art, renewing itself from age to age and place to place, nourishing itself as it changes and grows by absorbing new content and new forms from the diversity of interests and customs among the many people and peoples it entertains and inspires.

But even these imitative groups, misguided though we may think their purpose is, perform a service in the cause; they bring opera, in whatever form, into the lives of many thousands who would not otherwise get to know it, and they provide opportunities for personal participation in the art to hundreds upon hundreds who would otherwise remain passive spectators at a guest performance or radio listeners from afar.

It is proper and fitting that the new opera groups should be as richly varied in form and program as the American people themselves. For from the very welter of their ideas and aims and policies will issue the elements and the patterns of the people's opera.

And it is a people's opera that we want—an opera that is important to the people because it takes meaning from and gives meaning to *their* lives.

We have seen that as soon as World War II ended, the people in Vienna and Milan, although their stomachs were empty and their houses in ruins, resumed support of their opera by permitting the use of their tax money for government subsidy. They did this because opera had, by tradition, become a part of their very life and spoke in every way their language.

Yet even this degree of democratic sponsorship and participation

## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

did not satisfy such great creative minds as Wagner, Tolstoy, and Romain Rolland. These men of vision felt that the art of the theater, which includes opera, must itself undergo a change, that it should not be just a business enterprise, merely a pleasure for the entertainment of the wealthy and the bored, or an art for only art's sake; they felt that it must become a means of communication among all the people, uniting them in the sharing of a common cultural experience. "Art has no right to exist if it is not destined for the people," said Tolstoy.

In *The People's Theater*, written when this century was still young, Romain Rolland called for a new form of musical theater corresponding to the needs of the modern community.

"I do not know whether the society of today will create its own art," he wrote, "but I am sure that if it fails to do so, we shall have no living art, only a museum, a mausoleum wherein sleep the embalmed mummies of the past. . . . Let us not blindly seek to impose upon the people of the twentieth century the art and thought of the aristocratic society of the past. And besides, the People's Theater has more important work to do than to collect the fragments of the bourgeois theater. It is not our intention to increase the audience of the established theaters; we are not working for them; we have only to think of the welfare of art and of the people."<sup>1</sup>

In America, too, forward-looking men have been advancing toward this goal. Paul Green is one of them. To the question, What do you mean by a people's theater? he replied, "I mean a theatre in which plays are written, acted, and produced for and by the people—for their enjoyment and enrichment and not for any special monetary profit."<sup>2</sup>

Green's symphonic dramas, especially those he has done in festive outdoor productions, reflect this definition. They embody ideas of a musical theater for the people similar to those of Rolland. Green himself has said:

"This type of drama which I have elected to call symphonic seems to be fitted to the needs and dramatic genius of the American people. Our richness of tradition, our imaginative folk life, our boundless enthusiasm and health, our singing and dancing and poetry, our lifted hearts and active feet and hands, even our multitudinous mechanical and machine means for self-expression—all are too outpouring for the narrow confines of the usual professional and killingly expensive Broad-

## TOWARD THE FUTURE

way play and stage. But they can be put to use enough, free enough, and among the people, cheap enough for their joy and popular use.”<sup>3</sup>

Grand opera in America seems to have failed to recognize the gap between these ideas—underscored though they have been by all the evidence of a new, vastly larger democratic audience for opera—and its old concepts, which are so encrusted with the European tradition of an earlier day. As Rolland defined the gap:

“Among those who claim to represent the aims of the people’s theater, there are two diametrically opposed ideals: the adherents of the first seek to give the people the theater as it now exists, any theater so long as it is a theater; those of the second attempt to extract from this new force, the people, an entirely new theater. The first believe in the Theater, the others in the People. The two have nothing in common: one is the champion of the past, the other of the future.”<sup>4</sup>

Grand opera has not come to grips with this basic issue. Like an aristocratic old lady who refuses to recognize a change in her fortunes, our opera has clung fast to its memories and keeps looking back to its glorious past.

This can hardly be considered a farsighted attitude, either in a social and artistic frame of reference or even from a practical point of view. Opera is the most expensive of all the arts, and the bill for what was once the exclusive privilege of royalty and a wealthy nobility can today and in the future be met only by the people. And why should they be expected to foot the bill for an art that holds itself apart and aloof, indifferent if not actually condescending about their needs and their tastes?

To expect complete government subsidy for opera today, as in Europe, would be unrealistic in a country where the idea of private sponsorship of other educational and cultural projects is firmly anchored in the political thinking. It would be especially impractical to plan on such subsidy for an art form whose civic function is questioned by a great many citizens. Is this notion not really putting the cart before the horse? Has opera not first to prove its worth to the general citizenry before it can justifiably appeal for public funds?

Yet, as our analysis has certainly shown, there is little sense in refusing longer to admit the simple truth that grand opera in America cannot long survive in any vital artistic way on its present financial basis. The answer must lie in a further broadening of the base for



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

allegiance and so for support—in making opera of real interest and importance to many, many more people.

There can hardly be anything offensive in this idea; it is thoroughly in line with one of the central trends of our age. In an address to the Mid-Century Convocation of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in March 1949, Winston Churchill named as the outstanding characteristic of our century “the enormous expansion in the numbers who are given the opportunity to share in the larger and more varied life which in previous periods was reserved for the few and the very few.” And more than a decade earlier Franklin Delano Roosevelt had pointed out that the sense of equality among men is, and should be, especially strong when they are dealing with things of the mind and the heart. “Inequality may linger in the world of material things,” he said, “but great music, great literature, great art, and the wonders of science are, and should be, open to all.”<sup>5</sup>

In considering ways and means for achieving a people's opera and making its operations practicable, we shall probably have to make a special case of the Metropolitan, along with perhaps one or two other major companies that may adopt its function and policies.

The Metropolitan is, and probably will always remain, the nation's showplace of traditional opera, where the standard works of the repertoire are presented chiefly in their original form and where the traditional apparatus, expensive as it is, may be seen and enjoyed. Yet, as statistics show, the Metropolitan's continued existence is seriously threatened by its financial instability.

Shortly after Giulio Gatti-Casazza arrived in New York in 1908, he voiced his criticism of the Metropolitan's stage to Otto H. Kahn, the institution's principal sponsor and official of that day. As Gatti-Casazza reported the incident, Kahn replied, “What you say is perfectly true, and we have noticed these things before you. But don't worry about it and have patience. In two or three years a new Metropolitan Opera House will be built, answering all needs.”

But forty-two years later, when Edward Johnson turned the directorship over to Rudolf Bing, the building was still the same, and the sets for most of the standard operas had passed their silver anniversary.

In 1944 a committee of the board of trustees under Allen Wardwell drew up recommendations outlining a long-range plan for the Metro-

## TOWARD THE FUTURE

politan's future. "New works, new settings, and restudy of old works to a far greater degree than we have been able to afford will be necessary if, over the coming years, we are to maintain our outstanding position," said the committee. It recommended year-round use of the building and the possible installation of an air-conditioning system toward this end; continuous employment of staff, orchestra, and artists; and the establishment of a separate public trust that would have "power to give its money to the Metropolitan Opera Association or any other non-profit association for the subsidizing of educational features or for the general help of such non-profit-producing companies."

These recommendations still, seven years later, remain urgent—and unfulfilled—necessities. And the deficits on operating expenditures alone continue to grow larger season by season in this period of inflationary costs.

Some rearrangements of programs and schedules may add a little to the income from ticket sales, but no decisive change in the outlook can be expected from that source since the audiences are seldom much under capacity now. And there is no assurance as yet of either local or federal government aid. The repeal of the 20 per cent federal admissions tax that loomed as a bright prospect in the spring of 1950 has so far proved illusory. Some idea of what it would mean appears from the fact that this tax for the 1949-50 season came within a few thousand dollars of equaling the entire season's deficit of about \$430,000.

Whatever the prospects of government assistance, however, private support will probably continue for some time still to be the main pillar of the Metropolitan's existence. But the methods of implementing this private sponsorship must be changed. No longer is the following of the Met limited to "approximately 50,000 persons . . . and no more," as Gatti-Casazza estimated it was in his day. Through the agency of radio alone the number has mounted to many millions. It is doubtful that passing the hat around every couple of years among a few public-spirited citizens is the fair solution under these circumstances.

It does not seem just that anyone should listen to twenty opera broadcasts lasting from three to four hours without paying a cent for the privilege, at the same time that the opera company is struggling to make ends meet in order to provide these performances. If every

## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

tenth person among the twelve to fourteen million listeners the Metropolitan claims for its broadcasts were voluntarily to pay one dollar each season—five cents per broadcast—the company would have a revenue from this one source of more than a million dollars, which would enable it to outdo any opera organization in the world in extraordinary productions.

If the commercial sponsorship of these Metropolitan broadcasts is found to be an obstacle to a just claim for public compensation, it should not be heresy to suggest that methods be investigated for exchanging one kind of sponsorship for the other. This problem and principle should be kept in mind also in regard to the probable future telecasting of actual Metropolitan performances or of studio performances with Metropolitan artists as arranged by the Met's new television section.

As we have said, the Metropolitan, with perhaps one or two companies that may follow its example, is necessarily in a distinct category. Suppose it does win through to a sound enough financial status to ensure, not just its continued existence, but its artistic development as well. This will not solve the problem of opera in America. Conditions and methods at the Metropolitan are not applicable elsewhere, nor can the operatic culture of the country rest on one or a few institutions. We must have opera companies and opera theaters in as many other cities as possible. We must have a network of operatic major leagues and bush leagues spread over the entire country.

The larger ones among them not only will perform operas for their own communities, but, aware of their democratic obligations, will act as production centers for the dissemination of opera to the people in surrounding areas. They will collaborate with other companies in the exchange of ideas, personnel, and production methods and equipment for the common good, and they will act as regional opera centers, promoting the interest and participation of the people in "little" civic opera centers in smaller communities.

Together the units of this network will draw a new public, new artists, and new production ideas from their communities and will gradually build up facilities and personnel for performances of the highest quality. For making our opera a people's opera is not to be mistaken for a process of lowering its ultimate standards. In the words

## TOWARD THE FUTURE

of Romain Rolland, "If popularization means vulgarizing, then we are opposed to popularization. It is our purpose to infuse new blood into art, and expand its narrow chest by giving it the health and strength of the masses." We are not suggesting that the glorious products of the human mind be subjected to any sort of cheapening or vulgarizing by the people; rather we are asking the people to give of their power, their vitality, their greatness of spirit for the enrichment of the art.

Before turning to the question of how these larger and smaller people's opera companies are to solve *their* problems of financial support and efficient organization, let us, with this idea in mind of holding fast to the essential quality of the art whose cause we plead, re-state and re-emphasize what we consider to be the fundamental and distinguishing characteristic of opera.

It is natural that the average American, unschooled in the traditional conventions of opera, should be led by its seeming artificiality in comparison with the realism of Broadway and Hollywood to consider it a "long-hair" affair more than a little lacking in sense. And it is a healthy common-sense reaction that has sought to temper the traditions of opera with the reason of the theater. Healthy because, as the eighteenth-century folk opera infused new blood into grand opera and thus in time created the masterworks of Mozart, so the musical theater of today can again be a stimulating influence in the further renewal and development of opera.

But, as we have stressed before in these pages, the attempt to "rationalize" opera, to bring it completely down to earth, can go too far—so far that there is no opera left.

Opera is fundamentally unreasonable. It uses facts only as vehicles by means of which to enter its own dream world. It treats in terms of music not only the story, but more basically the emotion arising from the story. And as a lover, analyzing the motives of his affection too "reasonably," might in the end find no love left, so too the reduction of the emotional content of opera to thoroughly realistic terms is likely to end in obliteration of its reason for being.

Neither the strictly logical realism of the theater nor the routine, lifeless spectacle of second-rate grand opera is the solution of the problem. Only devoted and knowledgeable attention to the sincere expression of honest emotions will produce true opera, and this is



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

fidelity to life on a higher level than mere photographic reproduction of external facts. In the words of Robert Edmond Jones, it is "not a description, but an evocation." In all the operatic "reforms" from Gluck to Wagner and Richard Strauss, this emotional truth has been the goal; in all of them factual realism has been only incidental or of merely relative importance.

In a letter to Goethe in 1797 the German poet Schiller wrote: "I have always had a certain faith in opera, that from it, as from the choruses of the ancient rites of Bacchus, tragedy in a nobler form might develop. In opera one is really free from servile imitation of nature, and over this road, although merely as an indulgence, the Ideal might steal into the theater. By the power of music and by a freer, harmonious stimulation of the senses, opera attunes the heart to a more beautiful receptivity. Here even pathos has more scope because it is accompanied by music, and the supernatural, which for once is tolerated here, would seem necessarily to produce a greater indifference toward the subject matter."

Americans resent emotions quickly if they are false, but accept them and share them gladly if they are true. This fact is evident when we observe American audiences listening with rapt interest to Bach's *Passions* and Handel's *Messiah*, or to the interpretations of Toscanini and Walter, Lotte Lehmann and Marian Anderson. And we have seen them deeply moved at performances not only of *Porgy and Bess*, *South Pacific*, and *Lost in the Stars*, but equally of *Orfeo* and *Fidelio* at Central City in the Rocky Mountains.

Let us not, then, through fear of something whose sense and logic is not immediately apparent, reduce operatic emotions to insignificance; rather let us give them nobler, truer expression in order to achieve that spiritual plane on which opera and the people can meet. Let us not lose the potential power of grand opera, as distinguished from musical theater, to interpret human emotions on their highest level. Let us not be afraid of opera.

Building on the foundation of an eternal great art and making full use of the social concepts and technical achievements of this country, we can create an American opera "of the people, by the people, for the people." And this, expressing the ideals and the faith of our nation, will contribute to the task of uniting the peoples of the world in a universal theater where the iron curtain goes up every night.

# *Patterns for a people's* OPERA

**THESE** local and regional opera centers we hope to see come into being all over the country—how are they to solve their problems of support and efficient operation in order to present performances of increasingly high artistic quality?

In the first place, they may extend their conception of what it is legitimate for them to produce. They need not limit their programs to any one segment of the operatic repertoire, which may be divided according to its styles and production elements as follows:

1. **GRAND OPERA.** This is the old *opera seria*, which includes the works from *Orfeo* to *Tristan and Isolde*, *Aïda*, *Elektra*, and *Wozzeck*. These we do not want to produce in pocket-sized editions, but in their complete, full-scale forms.

2. **FOLK OPERA.** Here we may place works of the *opéra comique* type, using dialogue (or *secco* recitative) and a variety of musical forms. Examples are *The Marriage of Figaro*, *The Barber of Seville*, *Carmen*, *Manon*, and *Porgy and Bess*.

3. **MUSICAL THEATER.** The bulk of this category is made up of works of less elaborate proportions, in which the musical forms are simpler,

## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

mostly songs and less complex ensembles. But, as demonstrated by Menotti's works, this group will often overlap folk opera and could be grouped with it under a single classification, perhaps "lyric theater."

4. **LIGHT OPERA.** This is the lightly draped popular sister of folk opera, especially welcome on gay occasions and in the summertime.

To date, "grand" opera companies in America have tended to shun light opera, considering it somehow beneath the dignity of their name. They have clung to this notion even though they have seen light opera companies getting along with much less serious financial losses than their own and in some cases with profits and a degree of civic support, and even though many of the opera companies' own singers, dancers, and directors were working in light opera during the summer period.

As we know, the customary short season, with its serious effects on employment of personnel, is one of opera's critical problems in this country. Also, the generally inferior quality of the opera ballet in America results at least in part from the impossibility of offering long-term contracts to good dancers, and the same factor affects the quality of the chorus. It would seem, therefore, that a sensible first step for our community opera company would be to plan a year-round operation of which a popular light opera season would be one phase.

The company would then produce grand and folk opera during the regular season and light opera during the summer months. It might also from time to time venture into the field of musical theater and perform some of the better works in that category. But most "musical plays" will probably do better in the hands of the legitimate dramatic company if there is one in the community. In this case, close collaboration between the two groups will be desirable—the opera company providing the theater group with soloists, chorus members, and other professional musicians as needed, and the theater group in return supplying actors for comedy and character parts in the operatic productions.

In working toward the elimination of short seasons, there seems to be no good reason why the local symphony orchestra and the opera company should not join forces, instead of both going about begging support for their separate programs, as they now do in quite a few cities. When a plan for merging the New York Philharmonic and the Metropolitan Opera was proposed in 1934, the main objection raised

## PATTERNS OF OPERATION

was that the orchestra was already overburdened by its heavy concert schedule, but this probably would not be the case in most other places, at least not in the smaller cities.

Reduction of the number of concerts, additional employment for some musicians, and contracts of longer term for the permanent members, all of which would follow upon such merging of activities, should give greater artistic and economic security to any orchestra.

Many outstanding European orchestras play both opera and concerts on a year-round basis. The Vienna Philharmonic, for instance, by participating at the Salzburg Festival completes a full year's activity with a six weeks' summer engagement. And the opera houses of La Scala in Milan and San Carlo in Naples have recently arranged year-round occupation for their large bodies of employees by adding a summer and fall concert season and a summer or fall opera season to their regular opera seasons, which last from December to the end of May.

In Europe the operatic season has usually been the central activity around which the other phases of an enlarged program have developed, but in America progress toward an extended musical season will have to come about differently. In most major American cities the orchestral season is an accepted institution, whereas opera, if it exists at all, is still a somewhat problematic newcomer. Its organization, therefore, will have to be built gradually around and within the framework of the existing concert season.

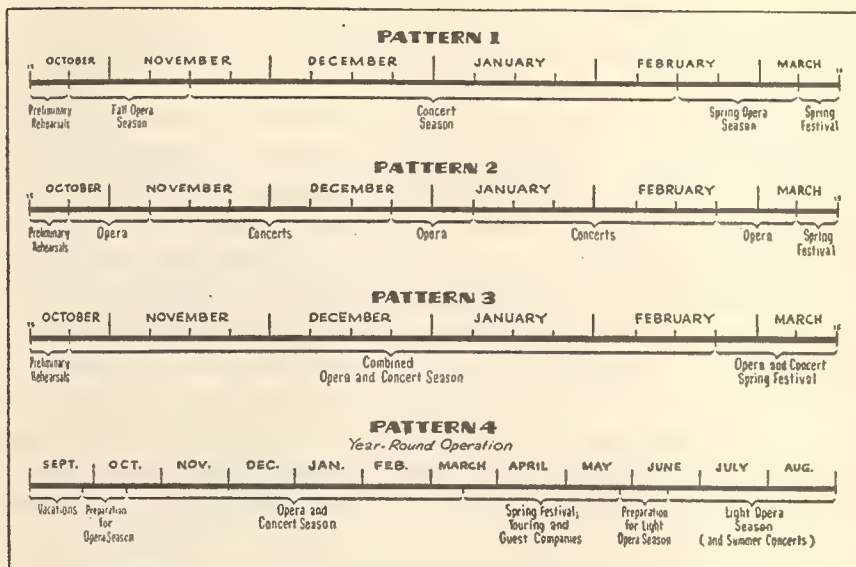
The methods for working out such a joint policy will necessarily differ from community to community, but four general patterns for a unified program occur to me, patterns that move progressively toward eventual integration of the two musical activities in a year-round schedule.

In Pattern 1 (see the diagram on page 248) the regular concert season is extended at beginning and end by a fall and a spring opera season. With one or two weeks of preliminary rehearsals with the orchestra and possibly a spring festival, this plan would result in a considerably increased period of employment for the orchestra.

Pattern 2 adds a third opera season as a midwinter break in the series of scheduled concerts. This plan would have the advantage of longer periods for the preparation of the operas, but the disadvantage of a very extended engagement of the opera company without cor-



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE



responding income. Perhaps in the future these intervening periods could be used by collaboration with local television stations producing studio performances of opera.

Pattern 3 calls for a complete integration of the two activities. Interspersing concerts with opera performances over an extended season would benefit not only the orchestra but the chorus as well, since appearances in concert with the orchestra would give it an added field of artistic activity and prestige. The ballet, too, could find opportunities to demonstrate its art in performances of its own in addition to its work in the operas. A spring festival following the regular season could combine opera, ballet, and concerts in a special program which, with guest artists participating, would help to alleviate any seasonal slackening of public interest.

It would not be difficult to move on gradually from Pattern 3 toward the goal of full year-round operation, Pattern 4. After the local season the opera company or the orchestra, or both, could go on a tour of the smaller communities in the surrounding region. And, after a preparation period, a light opera season as well as summer concerts could unite all the forces until Labor Day. Then a few weeks of vacation, and in early October the main season would begin again.

## PATTERNS OF OPERATION

I have not included in these suggested patterns the idea of participation in summer outdoor festivals, since those depend on local climatic conditions and are not universally feasible. However, if such festivals can be included in the program, they not only will give additional employment to the company's personnel but will prove to be one of the strongest means for cementing the alliance between the opera company and its community.

If we add the possibility of television and radio engagements, we have here in outline a feasible plan for a full year's activity for a community musical organization, working on a long-range program of which opera would be an important part. In such a project any losses from the opera unit would be reduced by the extended over-all operation of the organization. And no less important, through such an integration of schedules opera would become an organic part of the musical life of the community and would thus justify its claim to civic sponsorship.

I have been skeptical about the possibility of securing sufficient municipal subsidy of opera as a separate activity, but I am convinced that such support could be obtained for opera as a part of a comprehensive community musical program. In these days of municipal services of all sorts, there ought not to be anything too visionary in the idea of a Community Music Center, or even a Community Music and Drama Center, that draws a measure of its support from the common treasury because it serves the people.

Since this matter of adequate financing is basic in our problem, let us consider it in more detail. Our review has disclosed four major sources of financial support for opera and concert organizations:

1. Government aid, in the several forms of tax exemptions; assistance from municipal, county, or state educational, recreational, and advertising funds; personal help by city officials, as in the case of the New York City Center Opera Company; and use of a municipally owned theater. We have reported instances of all these forms of government aid already in existence in one community or another. And we have indicated that the few cases of direct government subsidies, small as the amounts are so far, are of encouraging significance for the future because they reveal a growing recognition of civic responsibility for the musical arts.

## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

We may add here the notable assistance given by the state government of North Carolina to the North Carolina Symphony. This organization, under its director, Benjamin Swalin, has grown from an amateur group, supported by a \$2000 state subsidy in 1944, to a wholly professional orchestra. During the 1948-49 season it traveled 6500 miles through North Carolina, Georgia, and Tennessee, giving 130 concerts, of which 73 were special concerts for a total of 150,000 children. By this time its membership of sponsors had grown to 14,500 and its state subsidy to \$15,000.

There are several such instances of city, state, and county support for symphony orchestras: The city of Baltimore has granted its orchestra as much as \$54,500 in one year, and the San Francisco Symphony receives one half of one per cent per \$100 on the tax rate of the city. This tax allotment was voted by the people as a charter amendment in 1936, the fund being administered by the Art Commission of San Francisco.

We may reasonably assume that as such policies spread to other cities, they can be extended to include opera too.

2. Support from educational organizations, such as musical foundations, universities, and the like. The University of Minnesota, for instance, permits the Minneapolis Symphony to make regular use of the campus auditorium at a modest rental taken in season tickets, which the university distributes among student members of its various musical groups. Since the university's department of concerts and lectures sponsors Minneapolis' annual season of guest performances by the Metropolitan Opera, there is no reason to suppose that the university's assistance to the city's symphony would not also be granted to an opera company that joined forces with the orchestra.

3. Private support in the several forms of outright donations, guarantees against deficits, guild earnings and collections, and the like. We have seen that this form of support is the foundation of a good many of the community opera companies already in operation, and it will almost certainly continue to be an indispensable source of funds for some time to come.

In most cases the list of private sponsors includes organizations of many different kinds as well as individuals, and the membership of these organizations along with that of the all-important opera guilds

## PATTERNS OF OPERATION

makes this private sponsorship a widely diffused contribution from the people. It follows, however, that if a sizable public is providing the means for the existence of the opera company, the company's board of directors should be composed of representatives of the various sections of that public.

4. Commercial revenues. These we have seen to be forthcoming from midseason or postseason tours, radio broadcasts, and theater rentals. To these sources of income, in our proposed patterns of operation, could be added the summer season of light opera and the sending of smaller units of the company to give performances in surrounding communities and nearby schools. For the larger companies there may also be income from the making of films and recordings. And the growth of television will almost certainly open up new sources of payment, offering opportunities both for the transmission of performances from the opera house and for the formation of an operatic stock company as a nucleus for telecasts from the studio.

The primary source of commercial revenues, of course, is the sale of tickets. The system of weekly subscription performances has long been the backbone of our opera companies' operations because it has seemed the surest way of guaranteeing in advance a maximum attendance at a maximum number of performances. But at the same time this system forces the company to produce an excessive number of operas if its season is of any length.

Since the week of an opera company often includes two days on which matinees are given and on which the stage consequently cannot be used for rehearsals, as well as a third day allowed to the personnel for rest, only four full days are available for stage rehearsals. Even if a short preseason rehearsal period is arranged, it is impossible under these circumstances to prepare twenty or more different operas for a twenty-week season in anything like a satisfactory manner. We have described the ruinous artistic consequences of this system.

In direct contrast stands the run-of-the-play system of the Broadway theater, in which a single work runs for as many performances as the public ticket sale will support. Although the New York City Center Opera, producing opera on the repertory system, relies on the public sale of its tickets and not on subscription, it is doubtful that



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

companies in less heavily populated cities could count on attendance enough today to maintain the necessarily expensive operatic apparatus on this basis.

I believe that a gradual accommodation of the subscription system to the new audiences will be advisable. These audiences will be larger than at present, and increasingly larger as the idea of opera takes hold of the people, but the persons composing them will rarely be in a position to afford weekly attendance at the opera. Subscription nights in alternate weeks might be a practicable plan, and this would cut in half the number of different productions offered in a given period. Each production could also be given at a students' matinee during its two weeks' run, and at an additional evening performance for which all seats would be on sale at the box office.

Such a schedule could readily be combined with orchestral concerts in the integrated programs of Patterns 3 and 4. I have diagrammed in Pattern 5 (page 253) a scheme to indicate the basic principles involved in such an operation. Two operas (A and B) are repeated for four weeks in six subscription series (I to VI) on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays of alternating weeks. During each weekend, performances are given for which all seats are offered at public sale.

During this four-week period three pairs of orchestral concerts are scheduled on Friday nights and Saturday afternoons; none is given during the fourth week, when the final rehearsals for the next two operas require the full service of the orchestra. During this fourth week one special performance of an opera is given on Friday night, again at public sale. Two student matinees are performed on Tuesdays of the second and third weeks.

This four-week program results in a total of twenty-four opera performances and six concerts. Monday is the day off for the orchestra, except during the first week, when, because of the preparation of the new operas, it occurs on Sunday. Friday is the day off for the other personnel, except during the fourth week, when it comes on Monday.

This schedule provides ten piano stage rehearsals and eight or nine with the orchestra for the preparation of two operas, three orchestra rehearsals for each concert (one on the stage and the other two in a separate hall), and one day of technical rehearsals.

This four-week pattern is to be repeated as many times as neces-

**PATTERN 5. COMBINED OPERA AND CONCERT SEASON. (Basic Four-Week Pattern)**

WEEK		MON.	TUES.	WED.	THURS.	FRI.	SAT.	SUN.
1st	A.M.	X	(X)	XX P1	XX P2	XX		
	P.M.						CONCERT	
	EVE.	X	(A) -I	(B) -II	A-III	CONCERT	B	
2nd	A.M.	P3		XX P5	XX P6	XX		
	P.M.	P4	(B)				CONCERT	B
	EVE.		A-IV	B-V	A-VI	CONCERT	A	A
3rd	A.M.	P7		XX P9	XX P10	XX		
	P.M.	P8	(A)				CONCERT	A
	EVE.		B-I	A-II	B-III	CONCERT	B	B
4th	A.M.	TECH-	X1	X2	X3	X4		X5
	P.M.	NICAL RE-					B	
	EVE.	HEARSALS	B-IV	A-V	B-VI	SPECIAL A	A	X6
5th	A.M.	X7	(X9)	XX P1	XX P2	XX		
	P.M.						CONCERT	
	EVE.	X8	(C) -I	(D) -II	C-III	CONCERT	D	
6th	A.M.	P3		XX P5	XX P6	XX		
	P.M.	P4	(D)				CONCERT	D
	EVE.		C-IV	D-V	C-VI	CONCERT	C	C

ETC.

OPERAS: A-D

Subscription series: I-VI

First performance: (A) - (D)

Student matinee: (A) - (D)

Piano stage rehearsals: P

Orchestra stage rehearsals: X

CONCERT REHEARSALS

In a hall: XX

On stage: XX

## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

sary to complete the desired length of season and it represents merely a minimum plan. If there is a larger potential audience, the number of subscription series can be increased and the basic period of the pattern can be extended, permitting a longer run for each pair of operas and more time for preparing them.

Under this pattern of operation leading singers who may not be available for the entire season can be engaged for the run of a particular opera, thus avoiding the changes of cast that are so ruinous to the artistic quality of a performance. Also, if repeat performances of unusually successful operas seem desirable, these can be added on non-subscription nights later in the season.

One way of providing additional assurance of attendance would be the advance sale of a single special performance or a small number of performances to a large sponsoring group such as a club, a labor union, an "artists' course," or the like. Other plans of this kind will suggest themselves to those responsible for the arrangements in each community if the guiding principle is kept in mind of giving the maximum number of performances of a minimum number of operas to large audiences at democratic prices.

One of the major beneficial effects of this principle will appear in the repertoire. When the necessity for giving a great number of inadequately prepared operas has been eliminated, the manager of the company will be able to concentrate his efforts on new well-rehearsed productions of a small number of operas. And with a reasonable measure of financial security in his operations, he can also forgo the usual timidity with regard to new works; he can demonstrate that opera is a living art by presenting to the people the works of their own day and their own creative minds.

Imagine the Broadway theater living only on its classics, or on plays written before 1911, the year of *Der Rosenkavalier*, the youngest opera in the standard repertoire of most opera companies! Opera cannot go on living solely on its past either. And it need not. In earlier chapters we have named a long list of interesting operas never performed in America and a host of new works that have been performed only in school or university workshops. We have also named some of the living composers who have written operas or would do so if there were a chance of getting them performed.

## PATTERNS OF OPERATION

There is no valid reason for believing that American audiences would not enjoy modern operas provided these are good. But if the fear persists that the subscription patrons of grand opera would not be interested in contemporary works, a studio group could be formed, either within the opera company itself or in collaboration with a university workshop, to perform modern works and rarely heard old ones in a special series. Those that proved successful could then be taken into the regular repertoire.

It need hardly be said, after all the foregoing discussion, that our people's opera companies will present their performances in English. Opera in foreign languages will always have a place: in one or a few companies that employ foreign singers who have mastered the languages of the original versions; perhaps in guest ensembles engaged occasionally to spice the programs of the local company; at festivals like those of Salzburg and Glyndebourne, where the esthetic values of the originals can be appreciated; and in schools. But in our community opera there must be no artificial barrier to communication and understanding between the author and the people.

In striving for year-round operation and for a program pattern that reduces the number of operas to be produced, our community opera companies will be aiming at a permanent personnel and a sufficient number of rehearsals to make possible truly artistic performances. Only under these conditions can directors and conductors, working closely together to reproduce the original score on the stage, weld into unity the various musical and scenic elements of opera: singing, acting, dancing, and orchestral playing; scenery, costumes, and lighting. Only then will opera enjoy the modern standards of production that have become the rule in the American legitimate theater and that will make opera the true musical drama it is meant to be.

We may express again the hope that in this process the new directors and conductors who will emerge to leadership will take the realism of the theater as a valuable guide to a truthful operatic interpretation, but will not be seduced into making it the final purpose of opera, which is so peculiarly fitted to present the higher realism of emotional truth.

The development of such a program as we have outlined would inevitably include the necessity for a modern building appropriately de-



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

signed to serve its intended purpose. This should not be an impossible part of the plan, since building such a cultural center not only is a duty for any self-respecting city but also in the long run would be economically feasible.

To finance it, a corporation should be set up to handle the investment of private capital by individuals and business organizations, and a separate trust or foundation to solicit gifts and donations. In later years, when the original capital has been recovered by the investors, the building would become the property of the city. With this in prospect, active municipal aid, including the grant of a building site by the city, should be a reasonable expectation.

The opera requires for its proper artistic and economic functioning a theater built according to modern principles of seating arrangement with sufficient capacity, an undistorted view of the stage from all seats, and up-to-date technical equipment. Since the building, unlike the European opera house, will have to serve a variety of purposes, the opera company can ask only that its particular needs be taken into consideration in the planning.

It is difficult to understand why this point needs emphasis. Yet modern theaters and university auditoriums have been built in the recent past, seating as many as 5000 people and costing millions of dollars, with stages that even at a pinch can barely accommodate a major opera production. Others lack rehearsal rooms and space for the storage of scenery.

The trouble is that theaters are usually built by architects who are expert in matters of auditorium design and acoustics but who know little about the requirements for opera production. And very rarely indeed has it occurred to these architects or to those who engaged them to call into consultation someone who does know something about opera staging. This is odd, since any big civic or university theater today is sure to be used at one time or another for the presentation of opera.

The size of the civic theater will depend, of course, on the population and resources of the community it is to serve, and also on whether the building is to include more than one theater. If at all possible, there should be a large auditorium, seating about 4000 in big cities and about 3000 in cities of medium size, for operas, concerts, and pub-

## PATTERNS OF OPERATION

lic meetings and a smaller one seating from 1400 to 1800 for plays and the like. It would be highly practical to include also a third hall seating from 500 to 800 for recitals and lectures; this could then be used also for rehearsals, including those of the orchestra, during the day.

In designing the large auditorium it would be advisable to base the plans on the modern idea of a "flexible" or transformable theater, so that it could be adjusted to the needs of the several functions it may be expected to perform: (1) the presentation of operas and ballets that rely on the traditional proscenium-framed stage; (2) orchestral concerts; and (3) performances of newer operas and other forms of drama and ballet that require the "theater-in-the-round" form of stage, as well as such other community activities as festivals and mass meetings and rallies.

In previous chapters we have seen that all but a very few of our theaters lack the facilities and technical equipment needed for an up-to-date production of opera. The new buildings should correct these deficiencies by providing:

1. The necessary stage space, which includes room enough on stage to accommodate the presence and action of large numbers of chorus and ballet members in addition to the principals, and also off-stage space at least twice if not three times as big as the area visible to the audience.

2. Facilities for placing and removing three-dimensional stage sets. This means moving ("wagon") stages or, if the available space is vertical rather than horizontal, elevator stages—if not both combined.

3. A removable revolving table or stage, which is especially useful for comic operas and operettas.

4. A cyclorama of some solid material to be used for projections.

5. A solidly constructed and movable light bridge to permit the firm, steady placement of projection equipment.

6. An orchestra pit of sufficient size which can be raised and lowered in and out of sight by elevators to meet the needs of various types of operas and concerts.

7. Rehearsal rooms in adequate numbers and sizes, including one for orchestra rehearsals if the building does not have a third hall that can be used for this purpose.

## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

8. Workshops and storage space to accommodate three-dimensional scenery, a sizable accumulation of properties, lighting equipment, costumes, and make-up materials.

9. A good amplification system.

10. Lighting facilities, including those for projecting stills and motion pictures from the auditorium; also viewing rooms, etc.

11. Studios or some other provision for recordings, telecasts, and film productions.

The new theater should also have such modern conveniences as (1) air conditioning for comfortable year-round use of the building; (2) lobbies, surrounding parks, and any other features that will contribute to the public's feeling of festivity when they come to performances; (3) restaurant facilities for those who want to eat nearby before or after the performance; (4) arrangements for easy access and parking, preferably under cover as protection in case of rain, for those, probably the majority, who drive to the building.

One possible design incorporating these ideas for serving the multiple purposes of a truly modern Community Center Theater is shown in the floor plan in Plate 97.

Most of the architectural problems involved in such a building have been dealt with by a number of progressive architects in plans and models for legitimate theaters. Norman Bel Geddes, Frederick Kiesler, and Walter Gropius pioneered the idea of a new form of theater which would break away from the peephole principle of the Renaissance by extending the stage and therefore the action out into the audience. This is the "theater-in-the-round" idea, of which Bel Geddes' *Intimate Theater* (1922) and Kiesler's *Raumbuehne* ("space stage," 1924) were the forerunners. It was first applied in actual buildings at the University of Washington in Seattle and at the Margo Jones Theater in Dallas.

Bel Geddes used still more advanced ideas in his models for the *Repertory Theater* (1929) and the *Divine Comedy Theater* (1929) prepared for the Chicago World's Fair, and in his designs for the *Ukrainian State Theater* (1931) he combined the traditional proscenium-framed stage with the space stage.

Meanwhile, in Europe Walter Gropius had planned for Erwin Piscator a "total theater" (1927) which could be transformed into the arena form by revolving a part of the auditorium.<sup>1</sup> And Bel Geddes'

## PATTERNS OF OPERATION

creative mind next set forth, in projects and articles, the concept of a "flexible theater" which could meet a need for the traditional proscenium frame and also perform any other function of theater space.<sup>2</sup>

Joseph Urban, in his designs for a new Metropolitan Opera House and also for a Community Music Center, applied many of these ideas directly to the requirements of a specialized opera theater.<sup>3</sup>

The Kleinhans Concert Hall in Buffalo, designed by Eliel and Eero Saarinen, is a model for a modern indoor concert hall, and the plans drawn up by the same architects for the Shed at Tanglewood and the "tent" for the Goethe Centennial at Aspen, Colorado, proved felicitous in their fine acoustics and general suitability for concert purposes. In the theater built for the Berkshire Music Center the Saarinens successfully combined the functions of opera and concert.

The auditoriums of the Universities of Indiana and Minnesota and the projects for theaters at Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire, and Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts, have dealt with the special problems of school theaters with varying degrees of success. In the Red Rocks Theater near Denver, the architect Burnham Hoyt has created an outdoor theater of exceptional beauty and proportions. And Frank Lloyd Wright's "New Theatre" project prepared for Hartford, Connecticut, will provide the legitimate stage direct communication with its audience. As Mr. Wright has described it:

"This structure is designed to free the so-called legitimate stage from its present peep-show character and high stagehouse overhead, establishing a simple workable basis for presenting plays as a circumstance in the round. Now the show is like a painting: a scene-drop behind a proscenium frame—audience in one room, performers in another. In The New Theatre audience and performers are under one ceiling, almost in one room—more like sculpture. . . . Sets may be prepared below stage and rise by way of tracks on dollies running on ramps to become 'scenery' on the revolving stage. Scenes may succeed one another almost instantly. Sets rise on one ramp and go back on the one opposite. If so desired a continuous performance may thus be staged and tedious waits eliminated."

One of the country's major efforts to achieve a building that will serve the multiple purposes of opera, light opera, musical plays, symphony concerts, ballet, and recitals is the design for a Los Angeles



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

Music Center prepared for the Greater Los Angeles Plans, Inc., a non-profit civic organization, by Pereira and Luckman, California architects. The plans include an auditorium seating about 3500 people and a concert hall with seats for some 1800.

According to a description of the plans given me by William Pereira: "The stage and its adjacent facilities are contained in a huge triangle. The stage level is divided into three sections. The main stage is an expanded 'U' in shape. Directly behind it is the rehearsal stage, approximately four times the playing area of the main stage, and directly behind this rehearsal stage is the workshop, which is located at the apex of the triangle.

"All make-up rooms, storage rooms, small rehearsal rooms, orchestra rooms, etc. are housed above the rehearsal stage and the workshop. The height of the main stage and the space flanking the proscenium are designed as an elaborate system for scenery storage, which is almost entirely mechanically operated.

"The generous foyer and lobby space surrounds the entire auditorium, with part of it indoors and part outdoors. The restaurants open off the foyer space as well as off the street. The parking is all accommodated on terraces between rows of trees, and two long arms stretching out of the parking lot provide ready means of self-parking and are also intended to be concourses containing a museum of music. Another advantage of this concourse idea is that it will avoid congestion after the performance by enabling people to disperse from the site at approximately sixteen different points."

Thus we see that many *individual* problems of the opera theater have been solved by our more advanced architects: the idea of the flexible auditorium, of the combination of concert and opera functions, of easy access and parking, and so on. But even these solutions still remain, almost without exception, plans on paper. And no opera house combining all these features, and including provisions for the technical equipment needed, has been created even on paper. Indeed, in the matter of technical apparatus for the operatic stage we lag far behind. Not only do we need to have more of our architects incorporate in their plans such known devices as wagon and elevator stages, but we need ideas and inventions that go far beyond even these in solving the technical problems of opera production.

In moving toward this goal, the study of European operatic theaters

## PATTERNS OF OPERATION

such as the model civic theater in Malmö, Sweden, and of new writings on the subject, in addition to the classic works by Sachs, Semper, Ferrario, and others will provide a stimulus. But ultimately these experiences and ideas will have to be adapted to meet the particular conditions of operatic production in America. In collaboration with progressive opera producers, the ingenuity of American architects will devise forms and arrangements in theater design and technical equipment that will permit the people's opera to fulfill its function.

A major part of that function will be to provide young American singers, writers, composers, conductors, directors, and scenic artists the opportunities they so badly need for the performance of their works and experience in their art. With the spread of opera performance and its recognition as an accepted activity in community life, many more young people of high caliber and ability will be attracted to opera as a field suited to their talents. They will be drawn from all segments of the people, to rise from the smaller communities to the larger and on as far toward the top as their native ability will carry them.

Quality performance in the people's opera will depend on the nation's producing artists who have acquired both a thorough knowledge of operatic techniques and ample experience in their use. For this reason the community opera company will do well to collaborate with an academy or school of music if one exists or can be established in the community.

The best opera teachers are usually to be found among those who are or have been artists themselves, and the personal participation of the conductors, directors, and designers of the local company as teachers in the corresponding branches of a local school not only will keep the training of young artists practical in its content but will also serve to inculcate the standards of good artists in the minds of their pupils. This would put an end to the *semiprofessional* approach of all too many young American singers, who are content with a relaxed sort of singing, diction, and acting that makes them appear to be reporting their roles rather than interpreting them.

If the artist-teachers are themselves of good caliber, their presence on the school's faculty will also increase the emphasis on the importance of expert, gradual, and disciplined voice training, which,

## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

along with the need for credible acting, remains the indispensable ingredient in training for opera. That this basic requirement can neither be speeded up nor be minimized because of exceptional natural gifts has been tragically demonstrated by the brief careers of many talented young singers in recent years.

The close liaison between the civic opera company and the school of music should make possible the free admission of students to the rehearsals and performances of the company, thus giving the students a chance to see and study the productions toward which their training is directed. Along with this will go the beginnings of experience in actual performances given by the school itself as a part of its training program for the more advanced students.

From this the young artist will graduate to a position in the local company of his own or some other community. To provide plenty of places for these graduates, there should be, besides the major community opera companies themselves, a great many "little" opera companies, corresponding to the familiar "little theaters," working either as independent groups or as units of a larger civic company. These are perhaps best suited to give fledgling artists a chance to acquire professional experience without being subjected to the taxing demands and exacting criticism encountered in the big opera theaters.

At present, as we have seen, these several steps in the experience of young artists are being provided primarily by the university and school workshops. However, important as their contributions are in the absence of other opportunities for experience, they are really only substitutes for, and cannot really replace, the actual opera company operating on an established schedule and with full professional standards.

Furthermore, the very way in which the variety of operatic projects has grown up in recent years has led to a sometimes sorry confusion about the respective functions of music school, workshop, and professional company. The schools, which ought to devote themselves to basic training in techniques and to inculcating the best standards of performance achieved by great practitioners of the art, are instead often busy experimenting with new works and production methods. Professional companies, which ought to be modernizing their productions and repertoires, are instead holding fast to the models of past ages. And workshops, which ought to be laboratories for analysis and

## PATTERNS OF OPERATION

experimentation, are instead trying to assume the functions of both the schools and the professional companies without performing either satisfactorily. We may hope that if we get enough community opera companies of the kind we have been describing, this tangle will gradually sort itself out into some sort of ordered division of labors.

Given the opportunities provided by a great number of opera companies receptive to new works of good quality, librettists and composers will find their own way to success. As Douglas Moore has said, "Apparently the only way that we can have successful American operas is to produce a few of them and encourage our talented composers to try their hand at it. We can hardly expect a full-blown masterpiece to roll along until there has been a lot of trail blazing along the road."<sup>5</sup>

To underscore his point we might remind ourselves that even Verdi had composed fifteen operas—twelve of which are totally forgotten, while three, *Ernani*, *Macbeth*, and *Luisa Miller*, are known only to connoisseurs—before he achieved enduring fame with his three shining stars, *Rigoletto*, *Il Trovatore*, and *La Traviata*.

It is only natural, I suppose, to think of some kind of national agency which will somehow tie loosely together the local and regional centers of our people's opera. Whatever its form, I feel quite sure that it should have no arbitrary authority over the community companies and should make no effort to impose standards or regulations upon them.

In January 1949 Representative Jacob K. Javits of New York introduced a joint resolution, with Senator Irving M. Ives of New York as cosponsor, in the first session of the 81st Congress. It was entitled "To provide for a national theater and a national opera and ballet," and its first section stated:

"Resolved . . . that the Congress finds that the United States of America, almost alone among the great nations, does not now have a national theater and a national opera and ballet; and that a national theater and a national opera and ballet are necessary for the enjoyment of these arts by the people throughout the United States and especially outside the great centers of population, for the instruction of youth in these arts, for the development of our national riches in dramatic and musical literature and talent, for the development of



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

playwrights, composers, performers, directors, and other craftsmen in these arts, and for enlarged opportunities for them; and that such arts are effective and vitally important means for the development of the democratic culture of the United States; and that the American National Theater and Academy has been organized under a charter granted by the United States but that it has not been implemented by the United States; and that the provision of a national theater and a national opera and ballet are in the best interests of the United States and shall be a policy of the United States."

The resolution contained within its other sections the conditions that plans for such an institution "shall be consistent with the purpose of our private economy, shall not be designed for unemployment relief, shall not hamper the existing theater, opera, and ballet, but shall supplement and improve their opportunities for development and expansion, and shall not involve governmental control or direction."

Perhaps the American National Theater and Academy (ANTA), on whose behalf this resolution was introduced, will in time become the national capstone of the people's opera. With funds to implement a program, it might play an important part in bringing that opera more rapidly into being. At a conference of ANTA in March 1949 Mr. Javits told its members, "A national theater could very well be established and maintained by public subscription and be self-supporting. The resources of the theater, opera, and ballet and their public support are enormous. They just have to be marshalled. The government could afford the opportunity for organization and could make available facilities in the way of the use of land and buildings where needed."

To such a national agency might also be added something in the way of an American Operatic Academy, which, dedicated to research and the dissemination of information, would serve as a conservatory and library where the most important operatic achievements of the world, past and present, would be available in models, books, and films for the use of the student and the performer of opera.

Such a national academy might at the same time serve as a creative center for the commission of new works and translations, for experimental performances and the exhibition of new production methods, and for the exchange of information. It might, far from least, function

## **PATTERNS OF OPERATION**

as a public forum where the common artistic, cultural, and economic problems of a people's opera could be discussed.

In any case, with or without such a national agency and academy, the organization of community companies throughout the length and breadth of the land can and will make opera in America a democratic and indigenous art—can and will, at long last, persuade this child of royalty and wealth to become a part of the everyday life of the American people.

## *Postscript*

**MY BLUEPRINT** for our people's opera of the future was finished. And I could see professionals shaking their heads at such lofty dreams. I wondered at them myself, tired as I was from a season's work at the Metropolitan, with all its headaches and heartaches about changing casts and limitations on rehearsal time and budget. I almost, as several times before, lost courage about the possibility of ever realizing such golden hopes. My only consolation was that I had just received a contract from Rudolf Bing for the next season calling for my services as stage director of eleven operas out of the total of twenty-one to be produced, so that I could not be wholly an impractical dreamer.

In this frame of mind I boarded a plane in Minneapolis (where the Met's spring tour had just ended) for another trip to Europe. This time I was to stage two operas at the Florence May Festival: Richard Strauss's *Elektra* and Gluck's *Iphigenia in Aulis*.

Leaving Minneapolis one morning and arriving in Florence the next evening was only the beginning of the summer's stimulating experiences. The day after the first rehearsals of *Elektra*, with Mitropoulos as conductor, in Florence's indoor opera house, the Politeama, I drove in a taxi to the beautiful Boboli Gardens where the Gluck opera was to be performed as an open-air production. Going toward the Ponte

## POSTSCRIPT

Vecchio on the Arno River, the part of the city which suffered most from bombardments in the war, I asked the driver the name of one of the bridges which had been completely destroyed.

"This was the Ponte S. Trinità," he explained, adding with Italian fondness for operative emphasis, "the most beautiful bridge in the world. It was here that Dante met Beatrice for the first time," and he went on to quote the entire stanza from the "Purgatorio" of *The Divine Comedy* which refers to this meeting. Any fears I had that Gluck's opera might be outdated today were thus quickly dispelled by this taxi driver. Obviously the classical world was still alive here.

Actually, *Iphigenia* was a great success with the people of Florence. Although the production was devised on a huge scale with hundreds of singers, dancers, and supernumeraries participating, the scenery, costumes, and properties were newly designed and executed—a fact made possible only by the generous government support of the festival.

The same was true of the other operas given by the Maggio Fiorentino, which included such rareties as Lully's *Armide*, Spontini's *Olimpia*, Dallapiccola's modern *Il Prigionero* (The Prisoner), and a revival of Verdi's *Don Carlo* in the original version. Given without cuts, the *Don Carlo* performance lasted five and a half hours. Strange, I thought; it had taken me only seven hours to cross the ocean.

From Florence I went on to Naples. Here the opera's energetic general manager was Pasquale DiCostanzo, a former tradesman who, after acquiring wealth, had decided to give up his business in order to devote his talent, time, and means to making Naples' historic San Carlo again one of the foremost opera organizations in the world.

As one measure toward establishing year-round employment of the personnel, DiCostanzo had initiated a summer opera season at the Floridiana, a beautiful garden overlooking the Bay of Naples, and for the special attraction of this 1950 season, his third "Neapolitan Musical Summer," he had decided to restore to new life after 2000 years the Roman Teatro Grande in Pompeii and produce there the first Italian performance of Handel's *Julius Caesar*.

This ancient theater, when restored, proved to be unique in its incomparable acoustics. With its present seating capacity of 3000 (originally 5000), it can well serve, with regard to proportion, sightlines, and acoustics, as a model of study for the modern theater architect.

The production of *Julius Caesar* was prepared with great care. At



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

first I was overawed by the task of combining the authentic old Roman theater with the Egyptian locale in which the action of the opera takes place. When I asked for some assistance on questions concerning the original Pompeian style, I was told that a gentleman would be at my disposal every evening for advice on any scenic details. The gentleman turned out to be the director of the Museo Nazionale, the outstanding authority in this field, and soon the stage was populated with Romans and Egyptians who dressed and behaved like their originals as seen through modern eyes.

Interpreted by an extraordinary cast, a conductor well versed in the style of Handel, and San Carlo's own designer and choreographer, the beautiful opera performed amid these historic surroundings was a memorable experience for the thousands of visitors who came by train and boat to attend it. It proved again how alive even an old opera can be to a modern audience.

On the way to Vienna, where I was to visit my parents, I stopped off in Rome and there got the same impression of the popularity of opera as I saw a huge audience filling the great Terme di Caracalla every night for the performances in the city's summer opera season. At the same time a Roman film studio was expecting the arrival of Gian-Carlo Menotti from New York to begin the filming of his opera *The Medium* with an American cast.

In Vienna I found the year-round operation of the city's Folk Opera just ending before the six weeks' summer vacation of its members. The season closed with a spirited performance of Vienna's classic *Die Fledermaus*, in which, in accordance with local tradition, the comedian, Frog, gave vent to the suppressed political feelings of the people. This time, alluding to the four occupying military powers, the tipsy jailer blamed the four different brands of alcohol for the aftereffects from which he was suffering: gin, whisky, cognac, and especially vodka, which he defined in a paraphrase of Goethe's Mephisto as "the spirit that always says no."

The personnel of Vienna's other opera house, the State Opera, had already moved to Salzburg, where rehearsals for the festival were beginning. There, with most of the seats sold in advance, the opera situation seemed, on the surface at least, close to the pre-Hitler period, when the Festspielhaus bustled with the inspiring work of Reinhardt, Walter, and Toscanini.

## POSTSCRIPT

And yet it was not the same. For nowhere did the outbreak of the Korean War arouse more anxiety than in Austria. Only a narrow corridor a hundred miles long separates Vienna from Salzburg, the seat of the United States' occupation forces. Would this lifeline to the West be cut and Vienna be left behind the iron curtain? Only the Americans could prevent it. The eyes of the Viennese were nervously turned toward Salzburg.

Thus the great role which the United States has assumed in the political world became clearly evident in Vienna. But in the operatic world, too, America's voice was making itself heard. The announcement of the Vienna opera houses for the forthcoming season listed on their programs the premières of two American operas: Gershwin's *Porgy und Bess* and Menotti's *Der Konsul*. For the first time America was exporting works truly its own in a field where before it had only inherited and copied.

Returning home, I was proud to be an American citizen and felt new courage for working at the task of making opera part of the American community. I looked again at my blueprint of the people's opera. No, it was no impossible dream; it was the inevitable result of existing forces. There can be no further doubt about its eventual realization. The site and the tools for building the people's opera are ready; the time is ripe. Let us start production.



# Notes

## The Book, pages 19-32

<sup>1</sup>Richard Wagner's *Prose Works*, trans. by William Ashton Ellis (London, Kegan Paul, Trench, Truebner & Co., 1895).

<sup>2</sup>Emily Anderson, *Letters of Mozart* (London, Macmillan, 1938), p. 1150 (letter to his father, Vienna, October 13, 1781).

<sup>3</sup>Richard Wagner's *Prose Works*.

<sup>4</sup>*Memoirs of Lorenzo Da Ponte*, trans. by L. A. Sheppard (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1929), p. 114.

<sup>5</sup>Anderson, *Letters of Mozart*, p. 1151 (letter from Vienna, October 13, 1781).

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 1143 (letter from Vienna, September 26, 1781).

<sup>7</sup>Franz Werfel and Paul Stefan, *Verdi the Man in his Letters*, trans. by Edward Downes (New York, L. B. Fischer, 1942), pp. 285-87 (letter from St. Agata, October 8, 1870).

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 279-80 (letter from St. Agata, September 8, 1870).

<sup>9</sup>*Correspondence between Richard Strauss and Hugo von Hofmannsthal 1907-1918*, trans. by Paul England (New York, Knopf, 1927). Quoted by permission of the publisher.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 7 (letter of December 22, 1907).

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 13 (letter of June 4, 1908).

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 35 (letter of May 4, 1909).

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 37-39 (letter of May 16, 1909).

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 54 (letter of July 10, 1909).

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 68 (letter of September 2, 1909).

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 72-73 (letter of April 27, 1910).

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 84 (letter of July 12, 1910).

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 86-87 (letter of September 7, 1910).

<sup>19</sup>Anderson, *Letters of Mozart*, p. 1151 (letter to his father, Vienna, October 13, 1781).

<sup>20</sup>Werfel and Stefan, *Verdi*, p. 179 (letter from Busseto, August 30, 1853).



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 189 (letter from Paris, January 24, 1855).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 204 (letter from Busseto, November 6, 1857).

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 178 (letter to Somma from Busseto, June 29, 1853).

<sup>24</sup> Anderson, *Letters of Mozart*, pp. 1143-44 (letter from Vienna, September 26, 1781).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1037 (letter to his father, Munich, December 27, 1780).

<sup>26</sup> Werfel and Stefan, *Verdi*, p. 282 (letter to Ghislanzoni, October 1870).

### The Music, pages 33-44

<sup>1</sup> Anderson, *Letters of Mozart*, p. 937 (letter of November 12, 1778).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1037 (letter to his father, Munich, December 27, 1780).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1145 (letter from Vienna, September 26, 1781).

<sup>4</sup> Rudolf von Freisauff, *Mozart's Don Juan, 1787-1887* (Salzburg, 1887). Albert Lavignac, *The Music Dramas of Richard Wagner and His Festival Theatre in Bayreuth* (New York, Dodd, 1932).

### Opera in English, pages 45-60

<sup>1</sup> Edward J. Dent, *Opera* (Harmondsworth Middlesex England, Penguin Books Ltd., 1940).

<sup>2</sup> Oscar Hammerstein II, *Carmen Jones* (New York, Knopf, 1945), pp. xiii-xiv. Quoted by permission of the publisher.

<sup>3</sup> Preface to the publication of Dent's translation of Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* (London, Oxford, 1937).

<sup>4</sup> Hammerstein, *Carmen Jones*, p. xv.

<sup>5</sup> From the score published by Novello & Co., London.

<sup>6</sup> Translation of *The Marriage of Figaro* (London, Oxford, 1937).

<sup>7</sup> From the vocal score published by G. Schirmer Inc., New York. Copyright 1947, 1948, 1951. Quoted by permission of the publisher.

<sup>8</sup> Hammerstein, *Carmen Jones*, p. xviii.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. xv, xvii.

### The Sponsorship of Opera, pages 61-78

<sup>1</sup> From the official statement issued jointly by George A. Sloan, chairman of the board of directors, and Charles M. Spofford, president, of the Metropolitan Opera Association.

<sup>2</sup> Figures and statistics here given come either from the Metropolitan's annual Statement of Operations or from the official announcements of the proposed cancellation of the 1948-49 season, issued by George A. Sloan and President Spofford on August 4, 1948, and published in the newspapers the following day.

<sup>3</sup> Giulio Gatti-Casazza, *Memories of the Opera*, trans. by Howard Taubman (New York, Scribner, 1941).

<sup>4</sup> According to the annual survey of *Opera News*. On the entire tour of 1947-48, starting in September, 41 cities were visited.

### From Rehearsal to Curtain, pages 79-110

<sup>1</sup> Gatti-Casazza, *Memories of the Opera*.

<sup>2</sup> Werfel and Stefan, *Verdi*, p. 230 (letter to Vincenzo Luccardi, February 17, 1863).

<sup>3</sup> Gatti-Casazza, *Memories of the Opera*.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Wagner's article on "A Theatre in Zurich," 1851.

<sup>6</sup> The original manuscript was in French and is at the University of Geneva. It con-

tains an appendix which deals with the scenic production, particularly the lighting of Wagner's *Tristan* and the *Ring*. A typewritten copy of the original, but without the appendix, is in the Theatre Collection of the New York public library. The book appeared in its complete form in a German translation under the title *Die Musik und die Inszenierung* (Munich, F. Bruckmann a. g., 1899). Unfortunately this work has not as yet been translated into English.

<sup>7</sup> Bruno Walter was kind enough to give me permission to quote the excerpts I have used from his manuscript.

<sup>8</sup> Published by Schuster & Loeffler, Berlin, 1921 (in German and not yet translated into English).

<sup>9</sup> As translated by Lee Simonson in the magazine *Theatre Workshop*, April-July 1937.

<sup>10</sup> In "About the Performance of *Tannhäuser*."

<sup>11</sup> J. G. Noverre, *Lettres sur la Danse* (St. Petersburg, Schorr, 1803), tenth letter.

### Buildings for the Opera, pages 111-121

<sup>1</sup> From Wagner's article "Bayreuth" (Final Report).

<sup>2</sup> Richard Fricke, *Bayreuth vor 30 Jahren* (Dresden, 1906), entries from May 9 to August 18, 1876.

### Training the Artists, pages 122-130

<sup>1</sup> Hey is the author of two books: *Deutscher Gesangs-Unterricht*, 4 parts (Mainz, Schott's Soehne, 1886), and *Richard Wagner als Vortragsmeister 1864-1876* (Leipzig, Breitkopf & Haertel, 1911).

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in H. F. Mannstein, *Geschichte, Geist und Ausübung des Gesanges von Gregor dem Grossen bis auf unsers Zeit* (Leipzig, 1845).

<sup>3</sup> Carl Hagemann, *Die Kunst der Buehne* (Stuttgart-Berlin, Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1822). Ernst Lert, *Mozart auf dem Theater* (Berlin, Schuster & Loeffler, 1921).

<sup>4</sup> Lilli Lehmann, *How to Sing*, trans. by Richard Aldrich (New York, Macmillan, 1918). Feodor Chaliapin, *Pages from My Life*, authorized translation by E. M. Buck (New York, Harper, 1927). Feodor Chaliapin, *Man and Mask*, trans. from the French by Phyllis Megroz (New York, Knopf, 1932). Lotte Lehmann, *My Many Lives*, trans. by Frances Holden (New York, Boosey & Hawkes, Inc., 1948). Victor Maurel, *Zehn Jahre aus Meinem Kuenstlerleben, 1887-1897*, with a foreword and trans. into German by Lilli Lehmann (Berlin, Raabe & Plathow, 1899); also, *Un Problème d'art* (Paris, Tresse & Stock, 1893) and *A Propos de la Mise-en-scène de Don Juan* (Paris, Paul Dupont, 1896). Lilli Lehmann, *Studie zu Fidelio* (Breitkopf & Haertel, 1904). Anna Bahr-Mildenburg, *Tristan und Isolde* (Leipzig-Wien, Musikwissenschaftlicher Verlag, 1936).

### Opera on Broadway, pages 133-150

<sup>1</sup> Published by Music Press, Inc., and Arrow Music Press, Inc., New York.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> In *Modern Music*, March-April 1934.

<sup>4</sup> *New York Times*, January 2, 1938.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, January 6, 1941.

<sup>6</sup> From *Our New Music* (New York, Whittlesey House, 1941).

<sup>7</sup> *Saturday Review of Literature*, February 1, 1947.

<sup>8</sup> John Erskine, Note to *Jack and the Beanstalk* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1931). Quoted by permission of the publisher.

<sup>9</sup> *New York Times*, October 4, 1931.

<sup>10</sup> According to W. J. Henderson in the *New York Sun*, March 3, 1934.

## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

<sup>11</sup>*New York Times*, May 4, 1941.

<sup>12</sup>*History of Popular Music* (New York, Random House, 1948).

### Community Opera, pages 151-186

The quotations throughout this chapter from managers or other officials of community opera companies are taken from letters they wrote me to supplement their answers to the questionnaire I prepared and sent out as a way of securing accurate information about as many such local companies as possible. I deeply appreciate the generous assistance given me by those who answered the questionnaire and sent me their comments and stories in addition.

<sup>1</sup>Press release by the New York City Center Opera Company preceding the guest season.

<sup>2</sup>*Chicago Tribune*, October 10, 1948.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup>*Opera News*, March 14, 1949.

<sup>5</sup>Cedric Hart, "Opera in Los Angeles County," *Opera News*, December 20, 1948.

<sup>6</sup>*Los Angeles Times*, April 30, 1950.

<sup>7</sup>*Time*, July 30, 1951, p. 63.

<sup>8</sup>Paul Green, Introduction to *The Lost Colony*, Memorial edition (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1946).

### Opera in the Schools, pages 187-206

The quotations throughout this chapter from directors or other officials of opera workshops and departments are taken from their letters to me or their answers to the questionnaire I sent them. I am grateful for their invaluable assistance in providing information to fill out this part of the story.

<sup>1</sup>In *Opera News*, April 16, 1945.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, October 31, 1949.

### Opera in Motion Pictures, pages 207-218

<sup>1</sup>Mordaunt Hall in the *New York Times*, February 25, 1926.

<sup>2</sup>According to a report from Berlin in the *New York Times*, January 12, 1926.

<sup>3</sup>*Variety*, February 25, 1931.

<sup>4</sup>*New York Times*, February 21, 1931.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, November 19, 1935.

<sup>6</sup>*New York Post*, April 14, 1941.

### Opera in Television, pages 219-231

<sup>1</sup>*New York Times*, December 5, 1948.

### Toward a People's Opera, pages 235-244

<sup>1</sup>Romain Rolland, *The People's Theater*, trans. from the French by Barrett H. Clark (New York, Holt, 1918), pp. 6-8. See also Wagner's essay, "Art and the Revolution," and Tolstoy's study, "What is Art?"

<sup>2</sup>Paul Green, *The Lost Colony*, Memorial edition (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1946).

<sup>3</sup>Paul Green, "Symphonic Drama," *College English*, vol. 10, no. 7, April 1949.

<sup>4</sup>Rolland, *The People's Theater*, p. 4.

<sup>5</sup>From *The American Way, Selections from the Public Addresses of Franklin D.*

Roosevelt, edited by Dagobert D. Runes (New York, Philosophical Library, 1944), p. 49 (address on February 22, 1936).

### Patterns for a People's Opera, pages 245-265

<sup>1</sup>Erwin Piscator, *Das Politische Theater* (Berlin, Adalbert Schultz Verlag, 1929).

<sup>2</sup>Norman Bel Geddes, *Towards a More Flexible Theatre* (printed and distributed by Dramatic Play Service, 6 East 39th Street, New York 16) and "Design for a New Kind of Theatre," *New York Times Magazine*, November 30, 1947.

<sup>3</sup>Joseph Urban, *Theatres* (New York, Theatre Arts, Inc., 1929).

<sup>4</sup>Edwin O. Sachs, *Modern Opera Houses and Theatres* (London, B. T. Batsford, 1896); Manfred Semper, "Theater," in *Handbuch der Architektur* (Stuttgart, 1904); C. Ferrario, *Storia e descrizione dei principali teatri antichi e moderni* (Milan, 1830); Friedrich Kranich, *Buehnentechnik der Gegenwart* (Berlin, R. Oldenbourg, 1933); *Architecture for the New Theatre*, edited by Edith J. R. Isaacs (New York, Theatre Arts, Inc., 1935); Edward C. Cole and Harold Burris-Meyer, *Theaters and Auditoriums* (New York, Reinhold, 1949); R. W. Sexton and B. F. Betts, *American Theatres of Today* (New York, 1927); Bruno Moretti, *Teatri*, edited by Ulrico Hoeplie (Milan, 1936); *Theaterbauten und Feiertätten* (Berlin, Wilhelm Ernst & Sohn, 1931).

<sup>5</sup>Douglas Moore in *Opera News*, April 16, 1945.



# Index

- Abbott, Emma, 46  
*Abduction from the Seraglio, The*, 10, 25, 32, 34, 39, 46, 62, 175  
 Abravanel, Maurice de, 84  
 Academy of Music (Philadelphia), 6, 8, 169  
 Academy of Music (Vienna), 5, 124  
 Academy of Vocal Arts, 202  
*Acis and Galatea*, 130, 189-90  
 Acting in opera, 88-89, 91-92, 101-3, 107-8, 130, 261, 262  
 Adler, Guido, 5  
 Agnini, Armando, 68  
*Aïda*, 26, 31, 33, 43, 75, 128, 204, 208, 210, 245  
 Alabama Polytechnic Institute, 210  
*Albert Herring*, 147, 190  
*Alceste*, 20  
 Alice M. Ditson Fund, 193  
 Aliferis, James, 199  
 All Children's Grand Opera, 178  
*Allegro*, 149, 150  
 Allentown Municipal Opera Company, 156-57  
 Amato, Pasquale, 191  
 Amato Opera Theatre, 177  
*Amelia Goes to the Ball*, 76, 140, 182  
 American Conservatory of Music, 202  
 American Lyric Theatre, 162  
 American Music Theatre, 160  
 American National Theatre and Academy, 264  
 American Opera Academy, proposal, 264-65  
 American Opera Company, 46; (Rochester), 46, 158-59, 160; (Philadelphia), 166, 169  
 American Operatic Laboratory, 173, 223  
 American Theatre Wing, 177  
 Anderson, Marian, 244  
 Anderson, Maxwell, 139, 140  
 Antheil, George, 115, 143, 144, 217  
*Angelique*, 146  
 Annual Festival of Contemporary Music, 193  
 Anthony, Susan B., 135  
 Appia, Adolphe, 90, 99-100, 116, 128  
*Arabella*, 76, 89  
 Aravantinos, Panos, 116  
 Archipenko, Aleksandr, 8  
*Ariadne auf Naxos*, 31, 36, 41, 75, 163, 200  
 Arizona, University of, 200  
*Arlecchino*, 76, 146  
*Armide*, 267  
 Arundel Light Opera Association, 180  
 Asheville Mozart Festival, 184  
 Ashton, Frederick, 135  
 Atkinson, Brooks, quoted, 136  
 Auber, Daniel, 34, 149, 212, 213  
 Auden, W. H., 146  
 Audience for opera, expanding, 13, 14-15,

- 239-40, 241-42: effect on production, 83,  
97, 101; effect of movies and television,  
207-8, 212, 218, 221
- Auric, Georges, 217
- Avery, Harold V., 171
- Baccaloni, Salvatore, 35, 107
- Bach, Johann S., 37, 194, 220, 244
- Bacon, Ernst, 144, 194, 196, 205
- Bair, Clifford, 172, 184-85
- Baldwin-Wallace Conservatory, 202
- Ballad opera, 34. *See also* Folk opera
- Ballanchine, George, 105
- Ballet in opera, 80, 105-6, 246, 248
- Ballo in Maschera*, Un, 30, 95
- Bamberger, Carl, 203
- Barber, Samuel, 145
- Barber of Seville*, The, 35, 43, 70, 109, 213,  
223, 227, 245
- Barbieri*, Il, 28
- Barrier*, The, 142, 193
- Bartered Bride*, The, 46, 175, 182, 204, 213
- Bartók, Bela, 76, 146
- Bastien and Bastienne*, 184
- Bat*, The, 43. *See also* *Fledermaus*
- Baum, Morton, 163, 165
- Baylor University, 195, 204
- Bayreuth Festival, 40, 81, 87, 117, 125, 180
- Bayreuth Festival Theatre, 82, 86, 112-13
- Beardsley, Aubrey, 96
- Beaumarchais, Pierre A., 24, 27, 96
- Beautiful Galatea*, The, 182
- Beecham, Sir Thomas, 215
- Beethoven, Ludwig van, 23, 31, 34, 36, 37,  
39, 43, 91, 96, 117, 182, 220
- Beggar's Opera*, The: Gay, 34, 189, 200;  
204; Britten, 148
- Before Him All Rome Trembled*, 214
- Bel canto, 40, 41, 125
- Bel Geddes, Norman, 9, 116, 121, 258, 259
- Belhaven College, 171, 201
- Belmont, Mrs. August, 13
- Benét, Stephen Vincent, 138
- Benois, Nicola, 96, 116
- Berg, Alban, 6, 37, 41, 77
- Berger, Ludwig, 210
- Berlin Opera House, 176
- Berkshire Music Center, 147, 181, 188-90,  
205, 259
- Berman, Eugene, 95
- Bernstein, Leonard, 136
- Bimboni, Alberto, 166
- Bing, Rudolf, 46, 64, 74, 75, 240
- Bird, Robert C., 184
- Bizet, Georges, 58, 59, 110, 210, 228
- Blitzstein, Marc, 135-37, 140
- Bloch, Ernst, 77
- Bob Jones University, 195
- Boboli Gardens, 267
- Bodanzky, Arthur, 43, 81
- Bohème*, La, 23, 109, 168, 189, 197, 204,  
210, 213, 223, 226-27, 229
- Bohème*, The Charm of, 213
- Bohemian Girl*, The, 181, 212
- Boito, Arrigo, 29, 31, 215
- Bok, Mrs. Curtis, 190
- Book, operatic, 21-32, 94, 142-43: suitable  
subjects, 22-23, 78, 133, 149-50, 183-84
- Boris Godounov*, 31, 42, 46
- Boston: Symphony Orchestra, 64; Grand  
Opera Company, 70; Opera House, 118;  
Opera Company, 127
- Brand, Max, 77
- Brandeis University, 259
- Brentano, Felix, 193
- Bristow, George F., 46
- Britten, Benjamin, 41, 75, 76, 171, 190,  
192, 194, 200, 205
- "Broadway," 14, 43, 109, 110, 128: home  
of American opera, 43-44, 133; moving  
toward opera, 149-50; production system,  
151-52
- Brooklyn Academy of Music, 68
- Brown, John Mason, quoted, 139
- Building, opera, 111-21, 255-61: historical  
form, 111-12; democratization, 112-13;  
suitability of European buildings, 116-17;  
inadequacies of American buildings, 117-  
21; community opera "ideal," 154, 255-  
58; work of modern designers, 258-61.  
*See also* Scenery; Stage
- Busch, Fritz, 84, 162
- Busch, Hans, 197, 199
- Busoni, Ferruccio, 76, 146
- Cadillac*, 76
- Cadman, Charles W., 153, 154
- Cain Park Light Opera Unit, 72
- Caldwell, Marguerite C., 111
- California, University of: at Berkeley, 199-  
200; at Los Angeles, 200
- Canada, opera, 166-67, 180, 196-97
- Canton Civic Opera Association, 166
- Cape Fear Festival, 184
- Capriccio*, 76
- Card, Virginia, 160
- Cardelli, Giovanni, 171
- Cardin, Fred, 157

## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

- Cardwell, Amelia, 172  
*Carmen*, 9, 24, 34, 35, 42-43, 57, 58, 59, 75, 97, 105, 117, 178, 180, 204, 245: community productions, 152, 154, 155, 161, 167, 168, 170; film versions, 209-10, 213, 215, 216; telecasts, 223, 224, 227-28  
*Carmen Jones*, 48, 57-59, 228  
*Carmencita and the Soldier*, 59  
 Carolina Playmakers, 183  
*Carousel*, 149, 150, 160  
 Caruso, Enrico, 41, 130, 216  
 Cassidy, Claudia, quoted, 164-65  
*Cavalleria Rusticana*, 31, 75, 134, 153, 168, 171, 177, 185, 193  
 "Celeste Aida," 41  
 Central City Opera Festival, 181-82  
 Chaliapin, Feodor, 42, 128  
 Chapin, Rosamond, 51  
 Chapple, Stanley, 172, 199  
 Charlotte Opera Association, 184  
 Chattanooga Opera Association, 167-68  
 Chautauqua Opera Association, 159  
 Cheesman Park, 180  
 Chicago: Civic Opera Company, 68; Civic Opera House, 118, 119, 120, 163; Music Foundation, 164; collaboration with New York City Center, 164-65; Opera Theatre, 171; Concert and Opera Guild, 175; Symphony Orchestra, 176; Fine Art Opera, 178; Musical College, 202  
 Chicago, University of, 195  
*Chicago Sunday Tribune*, 164  
 Children's opera companies, 178-79  
 Children's Theatre School, 72  
 Children's Twin City Opera, 179  
 Christian College, 201  
*Christophe Colomb*, 77, 115  
 Choreographer, 105-6. *See also* Ballet  
 Chorus in opera, 9, 10-11, 80, 101, 103-5, 106, 246  
 Churchill, Winston, 240  
*Cigarette Maker of Seville, The*, 210  
 Cincinnati Music-Drama Guild, 172  
 Cincinnati Summer Opera, 68, 69, 75, 179, 236  
 City Center, *see* New York: City Center Opera  
 Civic opera, *see* Community opera  
 Civic Theater (Malmö, Sweden), 119  
 Cleveland: Symphony Orchestra, 176; Institute of Music, 202  
 Close-up in telecasts, 219-20, 222, 229  
 Coates, Albert, 158, 160  
*Coffee Cantata*, 194  
 Cohen, Frederic, 177, 203  
 Cole, Wendell, 173, 192  
 Colorado, University of, 194  
 Columbia Broadcasting System, 223-24  
 Columbia University, 135, 138, 141, 142: opera workshop, 193-94  
 Columbus Opera Club, 175  
 Comic opera, 35. *See also* Folk opera  
*Common Glory, The*, 183  
 Community Music Center, proposed, 249, 256-57, 258  
 Community opera: development, 14, 235-37; compared to Broadway musicals, 151-52; community companies, 152-75, *see also* names of individual communities; use of English, 152, 153, 157, 158, 159-60, 161, 163, 166, 168, 169, 172, 173, 174, 176, 177, 182, 185, 186; auditoriums, 154, 179, 182, 183, 256-61; financing, 155, 157, 160, 161, 162-63, 164, 169, 170-71, 174, 180-81, 182, 186, 249-52; and music schools, 158-59, 261-62; influence of World War II, 159, 168-69; opera guilds' support, 175-76; and symphony orchestras, 176, 246-47; nationality groups, 177; children's groups, 178-79; puppet opera, 179; festivals, 180-85; summary of aims, 186; proposed patterns of operation, 247-48, 252-54; national agency, 263-65  
 Composers, 76-77, 145-46, 205, 254, 263: and librettist, 25-29. *See also* Music  
 Concert music, in television, 219-20  
 Concerts and opera, patterns, 247-49, 252-54  
 Conductor, role in opera, 80, 81-82, 84, 85, 88-89, 106  
 Connor, Nadine, 160  
*Consul, The*, 141, 149, 269  
 Converse College, 144, 201  
 Cooper, Emil, 167, 182  
 Co-Opera Company, 223  
 Copland, Aaron, 137, 146, 217  
*Così fan tutte*, 31, 162, 173, 184, 190  
 Cosmopolitan School of Music, 202  
 Costumes, 11, 95, 98-99, 154-55, 161  
 Comédie Française, 42  
 Covent Garden, 46, 62  
*Cradle Will Rock, The*, 135-36  
 Cross, Milton, 214  
 Crozier, Eric, 148  
*Cry, the Beloved Country*, 140  
 Curtis Institute of Music, 127, 140, 190, 202  
 Cyclorama, 114, 120, 257

## INDEX

- Dafne*, 22  
*Dalibor*, 169  
 Dallapiccola, Luigi, 267  
 Damrosch, Walter, 142  
*Daphne*, 76  
 Da Ponte, Lorenzo, 24-25, 27, 39, 53, 56, 96  
 Dantchenko, Nemirovitch, 59  
*Dark Waters*, 200  
 Dartmouth College, 259  
 David, Madame Athanase, 166  
 David Mannes Music School, 203  
 Debussy, Claude, 30, 36, 43, 51, 178  
 De Falla, Manuel, 146  
 Defrere, Desiré, 70  
 Dello Joio, Norman, 201  
 de Mille, Agnes, 147  
 DeMille, Cecil B., 210, 212  
 Dent, Edward, 48, 51, 53, 54, 56  
 Denver, University of, 181  
 Denver area, 182-83  
 Denver Opera Festival, 180  
*Denver Post*, 180  
 Design, scenic, *see* Scenery  
 Detroit: Civic Opera, 154; Friends of Opera, 175  
*Devil and Daniel Webster, The*, 31, 43, 138, 162  
*Devil's Brother, The*, 212  
 Dialogue in opera, 34-37, 226-27  
 DiConstanzo, Pasquale, 267  
 Diction, 87-88. *See also* Singing  
*Dido and Aeneas*, 194, 199, 204  
 Director's score, 106-7. *See also* Stage director  
 Disney, Walt, 217, 220  
 Divine Comedy Theatre, 258  
 Donald, Pauline, 166  
*Don Carlo*, 225, 267  
*Don Giovanni*, 31, 35, 40, 77, 90, 114, 117, 128, 197, 203  
 Donizetti, Gaetano, 39, 182  
*Don Pasquale*, 182, 213  
 Dow Chemical Company, 177  
 Downes, Olin, 188, 197, 214: quoted, 143  
*Down in the Valley*, 177, 197-98, 199, 200, 204, 205  
*Drâme lyrique*, 34  
*Dream of Butterfly, The*, 214  
*Driegroschen Oper, Die*, 139  
*Duenna, La*, 146, 177  
*Duke Bluebeard's Castle*, 76, 146  
*Duke's Jester, The*, 209  
*Dumb Girl of Portici, The*, 210  
 Dvorak, Anton, 175  
 Eager, Edward, 51  
 Eastern Seaboard Festival, 184, 185  
 Eastman School of Music, 158  
 Ebert, Carl, 175, 200  
 Edison, Thomas, 114  
 Edwards, Hugh, 173  
*Elektra*, 31, 33, 34, 41, 77, 84, 87, 95, 245, 266  
 Elevator stages, 114, 120, 257, 260  
*Emperor Jones*, 31, 76  
 Engel, Lehman, 136, 137  
 English translations, *see* Opera in English  
 Erskine, John, 142-43  
 Errolle, Ralph, 191  
*Erwartung* (Expectation), 76, 145  
*Eternal Melodies*, 216  
*Eugen Onegin*, 163, 222  
 Euterpe Club: (Greensboro), 175; (Los Angeles), 176  
*Evangeline*, 194  
 Evans, Dina Rees, 72  
  
*Faith of Our Fathers*, 184  
*Falstaff*, 10, 46, 84, 93, 117, 128  
*Fantasia*, 217, 220  
*Faust*, 24, 31, 35, 109, 130, 201, 209, 215  
 Feder, Friedrich von, 136  
 Fein, Phil, 156  
 Feo, Francesco, 124  
 Festival Opera Group (North Carolina), 184  
 Festivals, 166, 180-85, 249  
 Festspielhaus: (Bayreuth), 86, 87, 119; (Salzburg), 117, 269  
*Fidelio*, 23, 31, 34, 36, 39, 43, 46, 62, 84, 88, 91, 92, 96, 97, 103, 117, 128, 182, 196, 201, 244  
 Film, telecasts from, 224, 230. *See also* Motion pictures; Projected scenery  
 Financing of opera: government subsidy in Europe, 5, 62, 237, 267, in America, 62, 67, 236, 239, 249-50; effects of inadequate financing, 9, 15, 73-78, 83-84, 98-99, 106, 109-10, 204; at Metropolitan, 13, 61, 63-65, 70, 240-42; in local communities, 67-69, 72, 152, 155, 157, 160, 161, 162, 164-65, 169, 170-71, 182, 186, 249-54; from commercial revenues, 74, 118, 249, 251-54; from private and educational sources, 250-51  
*Finto Arlecchino, Il*, 146  
*Firebrand of Florence, The*, 139  
*First Opera Film Festival*, 213  
 Fischer, Ludwig, 32



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

- Fisk University, 194-95  
*Fledermaus, Die*, 43, 46, 162, 168, 213, 223, 268  
 Fletcher, A. J., 184  
 Flint, Michigan, Civic Opera, 152-56  
*Flora, or Hob in the Well*, 12  
 Florence May Festival, 10, 266  
 Florentine Opera Company, 157  
 Folk opera, 144, 243: development in America, 12-13; beginnings, 23; defined, 34; national variations, 34-35; use of dialogue, 34-35; on Broadway, 43, 183; examples, 245  
 Folk Opera (Vienna), 5, 268  
*Fool's Revenge*, 210  
 Foreign language: effect, 11-12, 42-43, 45, 46, 47, 50, 108, 127, 209, 211; in telecasts, 226, 230; place for, 255. *See also* Opera in English  
 Fort Worth, Texas: Civic Opera Association, 170-71, 195; Women's Guild, 175  
*Forza del Destino, La*, 31, 101  
 Foss, Lukas, 145, 199  
*Four Saints in Three Acts*, 134  
*Fra Diavolo*, 212, 213  
 Frank, Benno D., 178  
*Frantic Musician, The*, 223  
*Frau ohne Schatten, Die*, 76  
*Freischütz, Der*, 34, 36, 130, 167  
*Friedenstag, Der*, 76  
 "Friends and Enemies of Modern Music," 135  
 Freud, Sigmund, 5, 95  
 Fricke, Richard, 113  
 Fuchs, Victor, 203  
 Furtwaengler, Wilhelm, 10  
 Fry, William H., 46  
 Galli-Bibbiena, Giuseppe, 96, 112  
 Gallo, Fortunio, 69, 211  
 Gallone, Carmine, 214, 216  
 Garcia, Manuel, 125-26  
 Gatti-Casazza, Giulio, 65, 75, 76, 80, 118, 240, 241  
 Gay, John, 189, 204  
 Gebert, Ernst, 173, 200  
 Geiger-Tourel, Herman, 196  
 General Electric Company, 202, 222-23  
 George Pepperdine College, 201  
 Georgia, University of, 200  
 Gerard, Rolf, 175  
 Gershwin, George, 32, 41, 42, 43, 57, 133, 142, 217, 269  
 "Gesamtkunstwerk," 20, 82  
 Gesture in opera, 92-93  
 Ghislanzoni, Antonio, 26  
*Gianni Schicci*, 46, 146  
 Giannini, Vittorio, 145  
*Giants in the Earth*, 138, 194  
 Gigli, Beniamino, 124, 212, 215, 229  
 Gilbert and Sullivan light operas, 205  
 Gilman, Lawrence, 9  
 Giraud, Ernest, 35, 43  
 Glinka, Mikhail I., 210  
 Gluck, Christoph W., 9, 20, 21, 22, 32, 33, 37, 59, 105, 173, 182, 190, 244, 266, 267  
 Glyndebourne Festival, 35, 51, 117, 200, 255  
 Goethe, Johann W., 209, 215, 244, 259, 268  
 Goldberg, Albert, 175  
 Golden West Opera Company, 173  
 Goldovsky, Boris, 51, 169, 188, 190, 202, 224  
 Goodrich, Wallace, 127  
 Goldschmidt, Nicholas, 193, 196  
 Goossens, Eugene, 158  
 Gosseo, François J., 124  
*Götterdämmerung, Die*, 110, 113, 209  
 Gould, Jack, 222  
 Gounod, Charles F., 182, 215, 223  
 Government subsidy, *see* Financing of opera  
 Graf, Herbert: European training, 5-6, 122-23; in Philadelphia, 6-9; at Metropolitan, 10-11; in Europe, 61-62, 266-69; at Tanglewood, 188-90; at Columbia, 193; in Hollywood, 216-17; in television, 224, 225-29  
 Grand opera, 12, 35, 245. *See also* Opera  
 Green, Paul, 139, 183-84: quoted, 238-39  
*Green Grow the Lilacs*, 150  
 Gregor, Joseph, 76  
 Gregory, John, 181  
 Grétry, André E., 34  
 Gropius, Walter, 258  
 Grosser, Maurice, quoted, 134  
 Gruenberg, Louis, 31, 76, 142, 143, 217  
 Guilds, opera, 65-67, 175-76, 186, 236, 250  
*Gypsy Baron, The*, 43  
*Gypsy Blood*, 210, 213  
 Hageman, Richard, 142, 217  
 Hagemann, Carl, 128  
 Halasz, Lazlo, 163, 165  
 Hale, Richard, 173  
 Halévy, Ludovic, 24, 57, 59  
 Halifax Opera Group, 202  
 Hammerstein, Oscar, I, 50  
 Hammerstein, Oscar, II, 14, 43, 48, 57, 58, 149-50: quoted, 50-51, 59-60

## INDEX

- Hammond, Vernon, 169, 185  
 Handel, George F., 51, 57, 78, 130, 189, 190,  
 200, 244, 267, 268  
*Hänsel and Gretel*, 13, 31, 41, 168, 172, 221,  
 222  
 Hanson, Howard, 142  
 Hardin-Simmons University, 195-96  
 Harmonie Maennerchor, 157  
 Hart, Cedric, 174  
 Hartt Opera Productions, 201-2, 221, 223  
 Hasselmans, Louis, 191  
 Heinsheimer, Hans W., 197  
*Helen Retires*, 143-44  
 Heller, Adolph, 176  
 Henry Street Settlement, 137, 203  
 Herbert, Ralph, 203  
 Herbert, Walter, 160, 171  
 Hey, Julius, 125  
 Heyward, Dorothy and DuBose, 133  
 "High-note psychosis," 85-86  
 Hild, Oscar, 68  
 Hiller, Johann Adam, 124  
*Hin und zurück*, 41, 145  
 Hindemith, Paul, 6, 41, 76, 77, 146, 154,  
 205  
 Hines, Jerome, 160  
 Hinman, Florence Lamont, 180, 182, 194  
 Hixson, Mrs. Emily G., 153  
 Hofmannsthal, Hugo von, 26-29, 30, 76,  
 95, 103  
 Hoffman, Ernst, 197  
 Hollywood, *see* Motion pictures  
 Hollywood: Opera Reading Club, 176;  
 Chamber Opera Company, 177  
 Hollywood Bowl, 160, 174, 179-80  
 Holst, Gustav, 200  
 Honegger, Arthur, 200, 217  
 Horner, Harry, 97, 175  
 Houseman, John, 135, 136, 162  
 Houston, George F., 160  
 Houston Symphony Orchestra, 176  
*How to Sing*, 128  
 Hoyt, Burnham, 182, 259  
 Hughes, Edwin, 185  
 Hughes, Langston, 142, 193  
 Hugo, Victor, 95, 209, 215  
*Huguenots*, 24, 39, 40  
 Hunter College, 200  
 Hussa-Greve, Maria and Senia, 203  
  
 Ibert, Jacques, 146, 190, 217  
*Idomeneo*, 59, 190  
 Illinois, University of, 200  
 Illinois Wesleyan, 200  
  
 Indiana University, 197, 198-99, 204, 205,  
 259  
 Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra, 176  
*Intermezzo*, 36, 76, 87  
 Intimate Opera Players, 173  
 Intimate Theater, 258  
*Iphigenia in Aulis*, 9, 59, 266, 267  
*Iphigenia in Tauris*, 59, 190  
 Irish, Mrs. Leiland Atherton, 174  
*Island God, The*, 76, 140-41  
 Isouard, Nicholas, 177  
 Italian operatic films, 213-15  
 Ives, Irving M., 263  
  
*Jack and the Beanstalk*, 142-43  
 Jackson Opera Guild, 171  
 Jacksonville College, 201  
 Janacek, Leos, 77  
*Ja-Sager, Der*, 146  
 Javits, Jacob K., 263-64  
*Jazz Singer, The*, 209  
*Jeanne d'Arc au Bûcher*, 200  
*Johnny Johnson*, 139  
 Johnson, Edward, 10, 11, 65, 75, 76, 196,  
 240  
 Johnson, Thor, 184  
 Jones, Robert Edmond, 116, 158, 162, 181,  
 182, 244  
*Jonny spielt auf*, 115  
 Judson, Arthur, 6, 7, 9  
 Juilliard Foundation, 65  
 Juilliard School of Music, 127, 142, 143,  
 144, 159, 203  
*Julius Caesar*, 200, 267, 268  
 Julius Hartt School of Music, 138, 201-2,  
 204, 221, 223  
*Jumping Frog, The*, 199  
  
 Kahn, Otto H., 13, 158, 240  
 Kansas City, University of, 200  
 Karamu House, 177-78  
 Karp, Richard, 159  
 Kathryn Long Fund, 203  
 Kennedy, John, 71  
 Kern, Jerome, 43, 149  
 Kiesler, Frederick, 144, 203, 258  
 Kindergarten Grand Opera, 179  
*King's Henchman, The*, 76  
*King's Jester, The*, 215  
 Kleinhans Concert Hall, 259  
 Klemperer, Otto, 84  
*Knickerbocker Holiday*, 139  
 Komisarjevsky, Theodore, 163  
 Kopp, Leo, 156

## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

- Korngold, Erich W., 77, 146, 162, 217  
 Koussevitzky, Sergei, 147, 181, 188, 190  
 Kraft Television Theatre, 223  
 Krenek, Ernst, 6, 77, 115, 145, 200  
 Kritz, Karl, 84, 171
- Labroca, Mario, 61  
*Lady in the Dark*, 139  
 Lamont School of Music, 194  
 Lang, Fritz, 210  
 Lanza, Mario, 166, 216  
 La Puma, Josephine, 204  
 La Scala: (Milan), 59, 62, 117, 119, 228, 247; (Philadelphia), 69  
 Lavenia Nash Singers, 177  
 Lawrence, Robert, 199  
*Leben der Orest, Das*, 77  
 Lehmann, Lotte, 4, 9, 85, 89, 128, 244  
 Lehmann, Lili, 128  
 Leinsdorf, Erich, 84  
 League of Composers, 144  
*L'Elisir d'Amore*, 213  
 Lemonade Opera, 177  
 Leo, Leonardo, 124  
 Leoncavallo, Ruggiero, 228  
 Leoni, Eva, 179  
*Leonora*, 46  
 Lert, Ernst, 93, 127, 128  
 Lert, Richard, 160, 174  
 Lester, Edwin, 72  
*Let's Make an Opera*, 148  
*Letzte Rose*, 213  
 Levi, Hermann, 81, 82  
 Levin, Sylvan, 166  
 Lewis, Earle, 118  
*L'Histoire du Soldat*, 41, 145, 200  
*L'Heure Espagnole*, 146  
 Libretto, *see* Book  
*Liebe der Danae, Die*, 76  
*Life for the Czar, A*, 210  
 Light opera, 71-73, 212, 246, 251  
 Lighting in opera, 99-101, 107, 108, 114-15, 258  
 Little Rock Light Opera Company, 180  
 Linden, Eugene, 173, 199  
 Lockwood, Normand, 145  
*Lohengrin*, 6, 28, 39, 46, 52, 91, 92, 93, 109, 209  
 London, George, 160  
 Lortzing, Gustav A., 149  
 Los Angeles: Civic Light Opera Association, 72; City College, 160, 210; American Opera Company, 173; Sunday Evening Opera, 173; Opera Guild, 175; Conserva-
- tory of Music and Arts, 202; Music Center, 259-60  
*Los Angeles Times*, 175  
*Lost Colony, The*, 183  
*Lost in the Stars*, 140, 244  
*Lost One, The*, 214, 215  
*Louise*, 23, 213  
 Louisiana State University, 191-92  
*Love for Three Oranges*, 163  
*Love Life*, 140  
*Loves of Carmen, The*, 210  
 Lubitch, Ernst, 210  
 Luca, Giuseppe de, 212  
*Lucia di Lammermoor*, 155, 213  
 Luening, Otto, 145, 193, 194  
 Lully, Jean B., 29, 33, 41, 267  
 Lyric Theatre (Cleveland), 177-78
- Macbeth*, 77, 162, 263  
 MacDowell Club, 175  
 McFarren, Natalie, 54, 55-56  
 McKittrick, Fred L., 152-53, 155, 156  
*Madame Butterfly*, 19, 75, 84, 168, 180, 182; film versions, 210, 211, 216  
*Magic Flute, The*, 22, 31, 34, 37-39, 46, 75, 77, 160, 168, 201, 209  
 Magnolia Festival, 184  
 Mahler, Gustav, 4, 5, 81  
*Maid as Mistress, The*, 34-35, 199, 204  
 Make-up, 98-99  
 Malipiero, Francesco, 146  
 Malmö, Sweden, civic theater, 261  
 Mamoulian, Rouben, 158  
*Man and Mask*, 128  
 Manager, opera company, 80-81  
 Manhattan School of Music, 203  
 Mannstein, Heinrich F., 126  
*Manon Lescaut*, 34, 35, 163, 210, 214, 245  
 Mansfield, Mrs. Elmer, 176  
 Margo Jones Theater, 258  
*Marriage by Lanternlight*, 223  
*Marriage of Figaro, The*, 9, 23, 24, 35, 39, 40, 43, 49, 53, 54, 62, 77, 93, 94, 96, 104, 107, 120, 163, 168, 173, 174, 176, 184, 210, 213, 245  
 Marpur, Friedrich, 126  
 Marshall, Madeleine, 203  
*Martha*, 154, 168, 213  
 Martin, Frank, 62  
 Martin, Ruth and Thomas, 49, 51, 54, 55, 56, 163  
 Martin, Wolfgang, 84, 175, 200, 202  
 Mascagni Opera Guild, 204  
*Masked Ball, The*, 30, 95

## INDEX

- Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 240  
*Mathis der Maler*, 76  
 Matoaka Lake Amphitheatre, 183  
*Mavra*, 9  
 Master Workshop, 203  
 Maurel, Victor, 128  
 Mead, George, 51  
 Mecca Temple, 136, 162  
*Medium, The*, 23, 31, 41, 44, 141, 149, 193, 199, 205, 215, 223, 268  
 Meeker, C. R., 72  
*Mefistofele*, 31  
 Méhul, Étienne N., 124, 193  
 Meilhac, Henri, 24, 57, 59  
*Meistersinger, Die*, 10, 28, 39, 43, 91, 92, 94–95, 97, 99, 101, 103, 210  
 Melchior, Lauritz, 42, 98, 109, 216  
 Memphis Open-Air Theatre, 72  
 Menotti, Gian-Carlo, 14, 23, 31, 41, 43, 75, 76, 163, 172, 177, 182, 193, 199, 205, 215, 223, 246, 268, 269: operas, 140–42  
 MÉRIMÉE, Prosper, 59, 210, 227  
 Merola, Gaetano, 67  
 Merriman, Nan, 160  
*Merry Wives of Windsor, The*, 168, 190  
*Messiah, The*, 51, 244  
 Metropolitan Opera, 7, 9, 10, 13, 43, 50, 61, 69, 81, 82, 88, 94, 95, 97, 105, 107, 108, 118, 119, 120, 123, 127, 129, 130, 133, 142, 143, 144, 147, 151, 164, 167, 171, 178, 199, 202, 203, 205, 212, 236, 246, 250, 266: broadcasts, 13, 175; operas in English, 46; financing, 61, 63–66, 240–42; length of season, 63, 73; personnel, 63; attendance, 63–64; tours, 70; subscription series, 74; number of operas per season, 74–75, 110; repertoire, 76, 109; potential audience, 208; and motion pictures, 212; and television, 221, 224; special case in American opera, 240–42  
 Metropolitan Opera Guild, 13, 65–67, 175  
 Meyerbeer, Giacomo, 39, 114  
 Meyerowitz, Jan, 143, 178, 193  
 Miami Opera Guild, 166  
 Miami, University of, 166  
 Michener, James A., 150  
 Michigan, University of, 194  
 Mielziner, Jo, 116  
*Mignon*, 24, 34  
 Milhaud, Darius, 77, 115, 146, 217  
 Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra, 199, 250  
 Minnesota, University of, 199, 250, 259  
 Mitropoulos, Dimitri, 77, 84, 180, 266  
 Moeller-Hermes, Madame Thea, 157  
 Monteverdi, Claudio, 20, 21  
 Montreal: Festivals, 166; Opera Guild, 166–67  
*Moon, The*, 211  
 Moore, Douglas, 31, 43, 138, 162, 193, 194, 205, 263  
 Morganstern, Sam, 223  
 Morris, Newbold, 162, 163  
*Mother of Us All, The*, 135, 194  
 Motion pictures, 207–18: use of operatic excerpts, 14, 212, 216; as ideal medium for opera, 209, 218; disappointing record of Hollywood, 209, 212, 216–17; operas in silent films, 209–10; European operatic movies, 213–16  
 Mottl, Felix, 81  
 Mt. Airy Operatic Club, 184  
 Moussorgsky, Modest P., 41, 47  
 Moving stages, 114, 120, 257, 260  
 Mozart, Wolfgang A., 9, 10, 13, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 31, 32, 34, 35, 36, 40, 46, 48, 49, 53, 54, 55, 56, 59, 75, 77, 81, 93, 94, 96, 97, 117, 121, 168, 173, 175, 185, 190, 203, 204, 213, 243: influence on librettos, 25–26; opinion on rhyme, 29–30; skill as opera composer, 36–39; motion pictures of life, 215–16  
*Mozart auf dem Theater*, 93, 128  
*Mozart Story*, 215  
 Mozart Theatre, 173  
 Muhlmann-Metzger, Zerline, 178–79  
*Mulatto*, 142  
 Murger, Henri, 210, 225  
 Murphy, Edward, 201  
 Music in opera, 33–44, 57–58, 81, 82, 85, 88, 90–94. *See also* Conductor; Orchestra  
 Music schools, 187. *See also* Opera in schools  
 Music Theater Company, 223  
 Music Theatre Repertory Group, 172–73  
 Musical direction, *see* Conductor  
 Musical drama, 20–21, 255  
 Musical theater, 21, 236, 244, 245–46. *See also* “Broadway”  
*Musique et la mise en scene, La*, 90, 99, 128  
*My Many Lives*, 128  
 Nagy, Elmer, 182, 202, 223  
 National Association for Opera, 172, 185  
 National Broadcasting Company, 141, 222–23, 225–30  
 National Committee of Opera, 185  
 National Grand Opera Company, 70  
 National Music Council, 185  
 National Opera Association, 69



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

- National styles: in opera, 34-35; in singing, 41-42, 125
- Nationality opera groups, 177
- Nebraska, University of, 200
- Nebraska Wesleyan University, 200
- Negro opera companies, 177
- Neighborhood Playhouse (New York), 137
- Neues vom Tage*, 76
- New Amsterdam Theatre, 140
- New England: Conservatory of Music, 127, 169, 202; Opera Theatre, 169-70; Theatre Guild, 175
- New Guild Opera Company, 173-75
- New Lyric Stage, 177
- New Opera Company (New York), 162
- New Orleans Opera Association, 160-61
- New Pacific Opera Company, 70
- "New Theatre" project, 259
- New York Ballet Society, 177
- New York: City Center Opera, 69, 73, 76, 108, 118, 136, 162-65, 249; Children's Opera Company, 179; Stadium Concerts, 180; College of Music, 203; Philharmonic, 246
- New York Times*, quoted, 211, 222
- Nibelungen*, 210. *See also* *Ring*
- Night at the Opera*, A, 212
- 9-O'Clock Opera Company, 176-77
- No for an Answer*, 136
- Nordoff, Paul, 145
- Norma*, 33
- Normandie*, 151
- North Carolina: Federation of Music Clubs, 184; Symphony, 250
- North Carolina, University of, 183
- North Dakota, University of, 200
- North Texas State College, 201
- Northern Ohio Opera Association, 65
- Norton, William W., 153
- Noverre, Jean G., 106
- Oberon*, 36, 209
- Oedipus Rex*, 31, 33, 105, 203
- Oenslager, Donald, 8, 97, 116, 182
- Offenbach, Jacques, 11, 57, 216, 222
- Ojai Valley Opera Company, 179
- Oklahoma!*, 43, 149, 150, 160
- Old Maid and the Thief*, *The*, 141, 172, 223
- Olimpia*, 267
- Omaha Association of Opera in English, 157
- One Touch of Venus*, 140
- O'Neill, Eugene, 143
- Opera: emotional essence, 19-20, 22-23, 115-16, 139, 243-44, 255; defined, 20-21; suitable subjects, 22-23, 77-78, 133, 134, 138, 139, 148, 183-84; combination of arts, 21, 81-82, 101, 255; styles and types, 41-42, 125-26, 245-46; history in America, 12-16, 45-46; importance in Europe, 6, 61-62, 237, 266-68. *See also* Audience; Book; "Broadway"; Building; Community opera; Financing; Light opera; Metropolitan Opera; Motion pictures; Music; Repertoire; Scenery; Stage direction
- Opéra (Paris), 35, 40
- "Opera-à-la-cart," 70
- Opera buffa*, 34-35. *See also* Folk opera
- Opéra comique*, 23, 34, 190, 245
- Opéra Comique (Paris), 35, 117
- Opera company, organization, 79-80
- Opera Guild of Southern California, 174
- Opera guilds, 65-67, 175-76, 186, 236, 250
- Opera house, *see* Building
- Opera in English, 45-60, 157, 158, 159, 161, 163, 169, 172, 173, 174, 177, 182, 186, 236; in community performances, 153, 159-60, 166, 168, 185, 199, 203, 204, 205
- Opera in schools, 142, 145, 187-206, 262; in high schools, 146, 204; for children, 156, 161, 166, 178-79; in universities, 190-200; in colleges, 200-1; at music schools, 201-4; repertoire, 204-5
- Opera News*, 66, 204
- "Opera reading clubs," 175-76
- Opera seria*, 22, 33, 34, 37, 39, 245
- Opera workshops, 156, 187-88, 235, 262-63. *See also* Opera in schools
- Operatic book, *see* Book
- Orchestra, 15-16, 176, 246-48, 252-53: size, 40-41, 88, 145, 146, 147, 148, 228
- Oregon, University of, 200
- Orfeo*: Gluck, 20, 22, 62, 105, 173, 182, 244, 245; Monteverdi, 20
- Orff, Carl, 178
- Ornstein's School of Music, 202
- Otello*, 29, 50, 90, 93, 117, 128, 208, 216-17, 221, 222, 224
- Outdoor opera, 179-80, 182, 183-84. *See also* Festivals
- Pacific University, 200
- Pages from My Life*, 128
- Pagliacci*, 31, 75, 168, 177, 211, 213, 215, 222, 223, 228, 229
- Palestrina*, 62, 77
- Paranov, Moshe, 202, 223
- Paris Conservatory, 124

- Parsifal*, 46, 75, 82, 99, 115, 117, 178, 198-99, 209, 210
- Pasternak, Joseph, 216-17
- Pastoral Symphony*, 220
- Paton, Alan, 140
- Patterns of operation, 247-49, 252-54
- Paul Bunyan*, 146-47, 194
- Le Pauvre Matelot*, 146
- Peabody Conservatory of Music, 127
- Peabody Institute, 202
- Peep-show stage, 112, 113, 116, 258, 259.  
See also Stage
- Pelléas and Mélisande*, 30, 31, 36, 43, 47, 117, 163, 166
- Pelletier, Wilfred, 166
- Peltz, Mrs. John DeWitt, 66
- People's Theater, The*, 238
- Pereira, William, 260
- Pergolesi, Giovanni, 34, 199, 204
- Perlea, Jonel, 176
- Peroni Opera Guild, 173
- Peter Grimes*, 76, 190, 192, 193, 196, 205
- Peter Ibbetson*, 76
- Petrillo, James, 165, 223, 228
- Pfitzner, Hans, 62, 77
- Philadelphia: Orchestra Association, 6, 9, 166; La Scala, 70; Academy of Music, 117-18; Opera Company, 141, 166; Civic Opera Company, 166; Chamber Opera Society, 177
- Philips Opera Group, 204
- Piave, Francesco, 24
- Piedmont Festival of Music and Art, 184
- Pierrot Lunaire*, 37
- Pinza, Ezio, 35, 107, 216
- Pipe of Desire*, 76
- Pique Dame*, 222
- Piscator, Erwin, 258
- Pittsburgh Opera, Inc., 159-60
- Pittsburgh Women's Guild, 175
- Polish opera companies, 177
- Politeama, 117, 267
- Pons, Lily, 212
- Popper, Herbert Jan, 84, 173, 190, 192, 200  
"Popular Price Grand Opera," 68
- Porgy and Bess*, 23, 32, 42, 43, 57, 133, 134, 142, 149, 244, 245, 269
- Porpora, Niccolo, 124
- Posz, Paul, 67
- Poulenc, Francis, 217
- Pre-recording, 228-29
- Prigionero, Il*, 267
- Prinz Regenten Theatre, 117
- Prodigal Son*, 178
- Producer, opera, see Stage director
- Projected scenery, 115, 120, 144, 257
- Prokofiev, Sergei, 31, 77, 146, 163, 177
- Properties, 99
- Prophète, Le*, 114
- Proscenium frame, 112, 257, 258, 259, 260.  
See also Stage
- Protzman, Albert, 226
- Puccini, Giacomo, 32, 46, 75, 146, 163, 212, 214
- Puppets in opera, 179
- Purcell, Henry, 194, 204
- Quattro Rusteghi*, 77
- Queens College, 200
- Quinn, Stanley J., Jr., 223
- Rabinovitch, Gregor, 214, 215
- Radamsky, Sergei, 173
- Radio broadcasts, 175, 208, 219-20
- Rahn, Muriel, 142
- Raisa-Rimini School, 203
- Raitt, John, 160
- Raleigh Opera in Concert, 184
- Ramuntcho*, 166
- Rape of Lucretia, The*, 41, 147, 171
- Raumbuehne, 258
- Ravel, Maurice, 146
- Reading Civic Opera Society, 157
- Real Princess, The*, 200
- Realism and opera, 19, 23, 45, 135-37, 139, 231, 243-44, 255
- Recitative, 34-36
- Red Rocks open-air theater, 182, 259
- Redlands Community Music Association, 180
- Regina*, 140
- Rehearsals, 85, 107, 108, 204: lack of, 12, 83-84, 89, 109-10
- Reiner, Fritz, 6, 81, 84, 162
- Reinhardt, Max, 162, 269
- Reiter, Max, 176
- Rendezvous, The*, 177
- Repertoire, 75-78, 109-10, 186, 204-5, 254-55. See also titles of individual operas
- Repertory Theater, 258
- Revolving stage, 9, 114, 120, 257, 259
- Rheingold, Das*, 110, 115, 209
- Rhine-nixies, The*, 57
- Rhodes, Willard, 193
- Rice, Elmer, 139
- Richardson, William H., 174
- Richter, Hans, 81, 82
- "Ride of the Valkyries," 103, 115

## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

- Ridi, Pagliaccio*, 215  
*Rifle, Axe and Plow*, 199  
 Riggs, Lynn, 150  
*Rigoletto*, 24, 85, 95, 117, 197, 209, 210, 213, 214, 215, 263  
 Rimsky-Korsakov, Nikolai, 47  
*Ring, The*, 30, 75, 82, 100, 109, 113, 114, 115, 117, 178  
*Ring of Polycrates, The*, 146  
*Rip Van Winkle*, 46  
*Rise and Fall of the City of Mahogany, The*, 77, 139  
 Riverside Opera Association, 157  
 Roanoke Island Festival, 183  
*Robin Hood*, 71  
 Robin Hood Dell, 180  
 Rockefeller Foundation, 177  
 Rodgers, Richard, 14, 149, 150  
 Rodzinski, Artur, 84, 176, 188, 189  
 Rogers, Bernard, 76, 142, 145, 199  
*Rogue Song, The*, 211  
*Le Roi d'Yvetot*, 146, 190  
*Le Roi s'amuse*, 95, 209, 215  
 Rolland, Romaine, 238, 239  
 Roller, Alfred, 5, 123  
 Rølvaag, O. E., 138  
 Roman Teatro Grande, 267  
*Romeo and Juliet*, 70, 182  
 Roosevelt College of Music, 202  
 Roosevelt, Franklin D., 19, 240  
*Rosalinda*, 162  
*Rosenkavalier, Der*, 19, 20, 26, 27, 29, 30, 86, 42, 75, 77, 89, 91, 99, 102, 103, 166, 210, 225, 254  
 Rosing, Vladimir, 158, 160, 173, 223  
 Ross, Glynn, 174  
 Rossini, Gioacchino, 35, 39, 213, 216  
 Rossini workshop, 203  
 Royal Conservatory of Music, 196-97  
 Royal, John F., 225  
 Run-of-the-play system, 151, 251  
*Rusalka*, 175  
 Russia: opera companies, 177; filming of opera, 210  
 Rychtarik, Richard, 189-90, 203  
 Saarinen, Eero and Eliel, 190, 259  
 Sachse, Leopold, 163  
 Sadler's Wells, 62, 147  
 St. Leger, Frank, 158, 182, 222  
 St. Louis, Mo.: Municipal Opera, 71-72; Grand Opera Guild, 171-72, 175  
 St. Paul Civic Opera Association, 156  
 Saint-Saëns, Camille, 33  
 Salem College, 184  
 Salmaggi, Alfredo, 68-69, 180  
 Salzburg Festival, 4, 5, 10, 51, 62, 81, 88, 95, 97, 180, 247, 255  
*Salome*, 27, 34, 41, 96  
*Samson and Delilah*, 10, 35  
 San Antonio Symphony Orchestra, 176  
 San Carlo (Naples), 247, 263  
 San Carlo Opera Company, 69, 211  
 San Francisco: Opera, 50, 67-68, 69, 70, 73, 74, 75, 236; opera house, 67, 97, 118, 119, 192, 193; Symphony Orchestra, 67, 250; Comedy Opera Guild, 177  
 Santa Monica Civic Opera Association, 166  
 Sarah Lawrence College, 200-1  
 Sarnoff, David, 225  
*Savitri*, 200  
 Sayao, Bidu, 107  
 Scarlatti, Alessandro, 124  
 Scenery, 8, 9, 96-97, 108, 109, 112-16, 120, 154-55, 186-90. *See also* Stage  
 Schalk, Franz, 4, 5, 75  
 Schorr, Friedrich, 202  
 Schiller, Johann, quoted, 244  
 Schirmer, G., Inc., 197  
 Schnitzler, Heinrich, 200  
 Schoenberg, Arnold, 5, 6, 30, 31, 37, 76, 145  
 School opera, *see* Opera in schools  
 Schumann-Heink, Ernestine, 212  
*Schwanda, the Bagpiper*, 192  
*Schweigsame Frau, Die*, 76  
 Scranton Community Opera Society, 172  
 Scribe, Eugene, 24  
 Seagle's Colony Opera Guild, 203  
 Seating capacity, opera theaters, 117, 118, 256-57  
 Seattle Little Opera House Company, 173  
*Second Hurricane, The*, 137-38, 146  
 Seidl, Anton, 81  
 Selden, Samuel, 183  
 Seldes, Gilbert, 135  
 Semper, Gottfried, 112  
*Serva Padrona, La*, 34-35, 199, 204  
 Servandoni, Giovanni N., 115  
 Sessions, Roger, 145, 200  
 Settings, *see* Scenery  
 Sevitzky, Fabian, 176  
*Shanewis*, 153; 154  
*Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains, The*, 172, 199  
 Sherwood Music School, 203  
 Shostakovitch, Dmitri, 217  
*Show Boat*, 43, 149

## INDEX

- Siegfried*, 52, 85, 88, 110, 209  
*Siegfried Idyll*, 219-20  
 Sievert, Ludwig, 116  
 Simon, Robert A., 51  
 Simonson, Lee, 116  
*Simoon*, 178  
 Singers, 43, 47, 50-51, 83-84, 85-89, 98-99, 101-3, 107-8, 127-30, 205-6, 261-62. *See also* Acting; Chorus; Singing  
 Singher, Martial, 107  
 Singing, 39-40, 41-42, 43, 124-26, 261-62  
*Singspiel*, 34, 124  
*Sir John in Love*, 193  
 Smallens, Alexander, 6, 84, 135, 146  
 Smetana, Bedrich, 169, 175, 213  
 Smith, Milton, 193  
*Snow White*, 217  
*Solomon and Balkis*, 154  
 Somma, Antonio, 30  
*South Pacific*, 149, 150, 244  
 Southern California Opera Association, 160  
 Southern California, University of, 175, 200  
 Spaeth, Sigmund, quoted, 149  
 Spartanburg Festival, 144  
*Sprechstimme*, 36-37  
 Sponsorship, 15, 71, 151-52, 186, 236, 242. *See also* Financing of opera  
 Staendetheater, 40  
 Stage, 112, 113-14, 116, 118, 256, 257, 258, 259, 260; proportions, 116, 119-20, 257  
 Stage directions in score, 82, 102  
 Stage director, 80, 82, 83, 90-108, 231, 255, 261. *See also* Graf, Herbert; Rehearsals  
 Staging, 89-90, 94-95. *See also* Stage director  
 Stanford University, 173, 192-93, 205  
 "Stars," 81, 82, 83. *See also* Singers  
 State Opera (Munich), 117  
 State Opera (Vienna), 4, 5, 117  
 Starlight Operetta, 72  
 Stavovske Divadlo, 117  
 Steber, Eleanor, 107  
 Stein, Gertrude, 134-35  
 Stephens College, 201  
 Sternberg, Daniel, 195  
 Stevens, Risé, 107, 212  
 Stiedry, Fritz, 81  
 Still, William Grant, 76, 163  
 Stoessel, Albert, 145, 159  
 Stokowski, Leopold, 6, 77, 84, 217, 220  
 Stone, Robert B., 222  
 Storage space, 120-21, 258  
 Stout, Barrett, 19  
 Strauss, Johann, 43, 46, 162  
 Strauss, Richard, 4, 5, 6, 20, 21, 22, 33, 34, 36, 40, 41, 42, 59, 75, 76, 77, 81, 94, 95, 96, 102, 103, 117, 163, 200, 217, 244, 266: collaboration with Hofmannsthal, 26-29; on diction, 87-88; about "exactness," 89  
 Stravinsky, Igor, 6, 9, 31, 33, 41, 77, 105, 145, 200, 203  
*Street Scene*, 139, 149  
 Strelitzer, Hugo, 201  
 Strickland, F. Cowles, 173, 190, 192  
 Subscription system, 74, 251-52. *See also* Financing of opera  
 Sullivan, Brian, 160  
 Summer opera, 179-85  
 Sundgaard, Arnold, 138, 197-98  
 Suppé, Franz von, 182  
 Swalin, Benjamin, 250  
 Swarthout, Gladys, 161, 212  
 "Symphonic drama," 183-84  
 Symphony orchestra, *see* Orchestra  
 Syracuse, University of, 196  
 Szell, George, 84  
 Tagliavini, Ferruccio, 213  
 Tajo, Italo, 107, 213, 215  
*Tales of Hoffmann*, 11, 57, 197, 215  
*Tales of the South Pacific*, 150  
 Tanglewood, 147, 148, 181  
*Tannhäuser*, 10, 85, 86, 91, 98, 105, 109  
 Tauber, Richard, 213  
 Tax exemption, 64, 236, 241, 249: on admissions, 161, 169  
 Taylor, Deems, 76, 142, 166, 214  
 Tchaikovsky, Piotr Ilich, 222  
 Teatro Colon, 62  
 Teatro della Pergola, 96  
 Teatro Fenice, 117  
*Telephone, The*, 41, 43, 44, 141, 177, 199  
 Television, 14, 172, 207-8, 219-31, 236, 248, 249, 251: concert music, 219-20; theater telecasts, 224-25; studio telecasts, 225-30; from film, 230; essentials summarized, 230-31; dangers in, 231  
 Tennessee Wesleyan College, 167  
 Terme di Caracalla, 29, 62, 117  
 Tessmer, Joseph, 179  
 Texas Christian University, 171, 195  
 Texas, University of, 195  
*Thais*, 210  
 Theater, opera, *see* Building  
 Theater an der Wien, 117  
 Theater-in-the-round, 258, 259  
 Theatre Guild, 134, 150, 158



## OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE

- Théâtre Lyrique, 35  
*There and Back*, 41, 145, 205  
 Thompson, Randall, 145, 154  
 Thomson, Virgil, 134-35, 194, 205, 217  
 Tibbett, Lawrence, 11, 42, 52, 142, 143, 211, 212  
 Timing in opera, 90-91, 93-94  
 Toch, Ernst, 77, 145, 200, 217  
 Tolstoy, Leo, 77, 238  
 "Toreador's Song," 57  
 Toronto, University of, 196-97, 204  
*Tosca*, 84, 163, 178, 180, 210, 214, 215  
 Toscanini, Arturo, 10, 61, 81, 82, 84, 85, 88, 104, 244, 269  
 Tosi, Pier Francesco, 125  
 Touring companies, 69-71  
 Tower, Carolyn, 173  
*Tragedie lyrique*, 31  
 Training the artists, 122-30: in Europe, 4, 5-6, 122-24; in America, 126-27; obstacles, 128-29; for a people's opera, 261-62. *See also* Singers; Opera workshops  
*Transatlantic*, 115, 144  
 Translation of operas, 51-57. *See also* Opera in English  
*Traviata, La*, 19, 75, 84, 88, 117, 130, 154, 168, 172, 193, 201, 214, 215, 224, 262  
 Treash, Leonard, 202  
*Tree on the Plains, A*, 144, 194, 201  
*Trial of Lucullus, The*, 200  
*Tristan and Isolde*, 8, 9, 30, 46, 97, 100, 176, 204, 245  
*Triumph of Joan, The*, 200  
*Troubled Island*, 76, 163  
*Trovatore, Il*, 22, 31, 90, 167, 168, 210, 213, 263  
 Tudor, Anthony, 105  
 Tuesday Musical Club, 175  
*Turandot*, 163  
 Union policies, 7-8, 73, 230  
 University opera groups, *see* Opera in the schools  
 Urban, Joseph, 259  
 Valenti, Alfredo, 159  
*Variety*, quoted, 211  
*Veil, The*, 199  
 Verdi, Giuseppe, 9, 13, 21, 22, 29, 31, 32, 33, 41, 46, 51, 80, 81, 85, 88, 93, 94, 95, 101, 128, 162, 212, 215, 221, 263, 267: librettos, 23, 26, 31; on verses, 30; demands on voice, 40; motion picture of life, 216  
 Vernacular, *see* Opera in English  
*Vida Breve, La*, 146  
 Vidor, King, 210  
 Vienna: State Academy, 122; State Opera, 122, 268; Philharmonic, 247  
*Vin Herbe, La*, 62  
 Wadsworth, Handel, 72  
 Wagenaar, Bernard, 145  
 Wagner, Charles L., Opera Company, 70  
 Wagner, Richard, 5, 6, 13, 33, 34, 41, 46, 52, 59, 75, 85, 87, 88, 90, 92, 94, 97, 98, 101, 102, 105, 117, 168, 178, 180, 182, 209, 210, 219, 238, 244: "Gesamtkunstwerk," 20, 81-82; on operatic book, 21-22; as composer-poet, 24, 30; demands on voice, 40, 125; request for Leseprobe, 86; "last request," 86, 87; as stage director, 99, 113; directions in score, 92, 102, 104; and opera theater, 112-13, 115; efforts toward German vocal style, 124-25  
 Wagon stages, 114, 120, 257, 260  
 Waldman, Frederic, 203  
*Walküre, Die*, 92, 99, 109, 110, 209  
 Wallace, Almeda, 179  
 Walter, Arnold M., 196, 197  
 Walter, Bruno, 10, 46, 81, 82, 84, 88, 107, 120, 121, 176, 244, 269: quoted, 91-94  
 Walton, William, 217  
*War and Peace*, 31, 77  
 War Memorial Opera House, 67, 97, 118, 119, 192, 193  
*Warrior, The*, 76  
 Washington Opera Guild, 175  
 Washington, University of, 199, 258  
 Waterside Theatre, 183  
 Waxman, Franz, 200  
*We Build a City*, 146  
 Weber, Karl Maria von, 34, 36, 130, 149  
 Wecker, Dr. Karl, 180  
 Weiler, Erich, 177  
 Weill, Kurt, 6, 14, 41, 43, 77, 177, 199, 205, 217: operas, 139-40, 146, 197-98  
 Weinberger, Jaromir, 77, 192  
 Welles, Orson, 136, 137  
*Werther*, 163  
 Western Reserve University, 200  
 Westminster Choir School, 183  
*When a Man Loves*, 210  
*White Wings*, 138  
 Whiting, Frank M., 199  
 Wiedemann, Hermann, 88  
 Wilde, Oscar, 96  
*William Tell*, 213

## INDEX

Williams, Vaughan, 172, 193, 199, 217  
Winston-Salem Little Theatre Opera,  
184  
*Wise Maiden, The*, 178  
Wolf, Hugo, 5  
Wolf-Ferrari, Ermanno, 77, 146  
Wolff, Emmy Land, 167  
Wolff, Dr. Werner, 167  
Wolmut, John, 166, 193  
World War II, 157, 159, 160, 168, 185  
*Wozzeck*, 37, 41, 77, 84, 245  
Wright, Frank Lloyd, 259

Wymetal, William, Jr., 160  
Wymetal, William, Sr., 127  
  
Yannopoulos, Dino, 203  
Young Artists' workshop, 203  
Young Peoples' Opera Company, 179  
  
Zanuck, Darryl, 212  
Ziegfeld, Florenz, 149  
Ziegfeld Theatre, 147, 149  
Zimbalist, Mrs. Efrem, 190  
Zweig, Stefan, 76



PLATE 1

TEATRO SAN CARLO

The royal box, Teatro San Carlo, Naples (1737, reconstructed 1816)

*The traditional opera house was built with the royal or court box at its center; around this the members of the audience were seated in tiers and boxes according to their social rank. The house was, as a rule, small and intimate, and the setting and action on the stage were seen as a picture in the "peephole" formed by the proscenium arch. (Plates 1 through 3.)*



PLATE 2

AUSTRIAN NATIONAL LIBRARY, VIENNA

The intimate Theater an der Wien (about 1000 seats) where *Fidelio* was first performed in 1805, with Beethoven conducting

The famous La Scala (1778, reconstructed 1946)

PLATE 3

LA SCALA, MILAN







PLATE 4

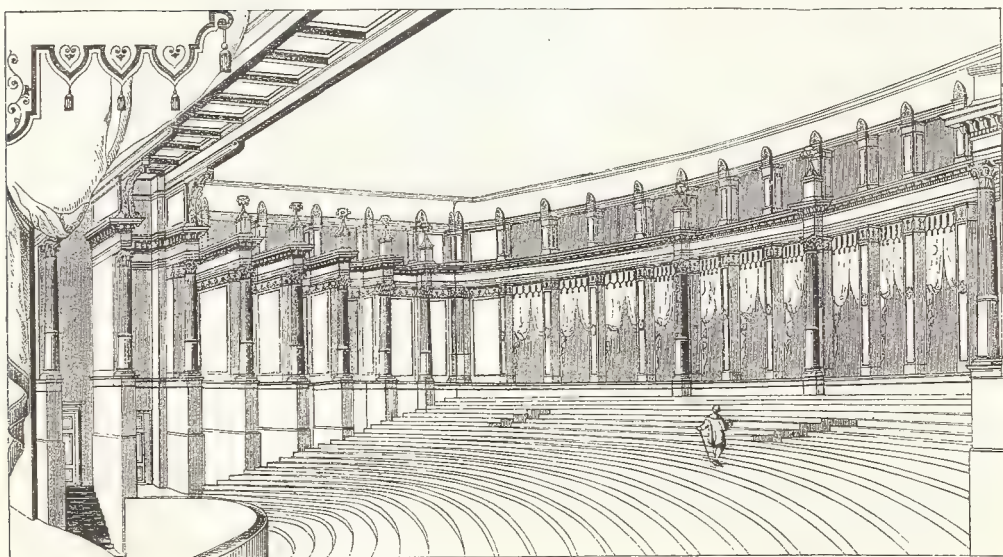
The Metropolitan Opera House, New York City, built in 1883

The box theater was imported along with opera itself into the New World, although the theaters were so much larger that the original intimate connection between performers and audience was lost

IN EUROPE the traditional form of opera house began to change with Wagner's plans for Bayreuth. He chose the amphitheater form for the auditorium, thus ensuring good sightlines from every point. He even moved the orchestra out of sight to permit an unobstructed view of the stage. Later theaters in Europe and America followed his lead and achieved a more democratic form of auditorium, but even in the more recent and beautiful of them the proscenium arch has been retained, separating performers from audience. (Plates 5 through 9.)

Wagner's plan for the auditorium at Bayreuth, 1876  
From the plans published as a supplement to Wagner's essay, "The  
Festival Theatre in Bayreuth"

PLATE 5



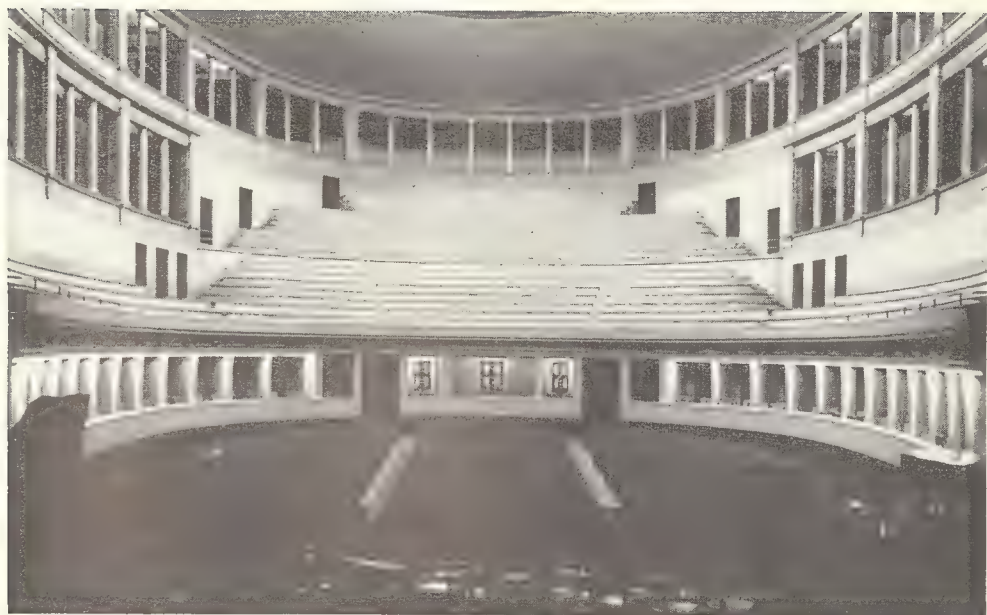


PLATE 6

The Teatro Comunale (Politeama) in Florence, built in 1932

The War Memorial Opera House in San Francisco, built in 1932

PLATE 7





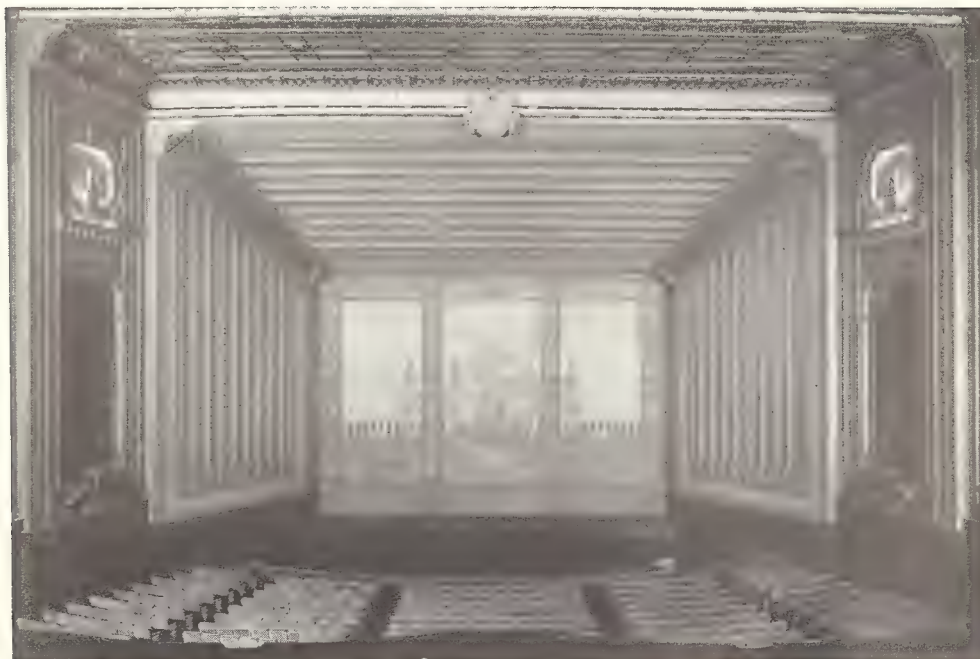


PLATE 8

METROPOLITAN OPERA GUILD

The Civic Opera House in Chicago, built in 1929

The Auditorium of the University of Indiana at Bloomington

PLATE 9

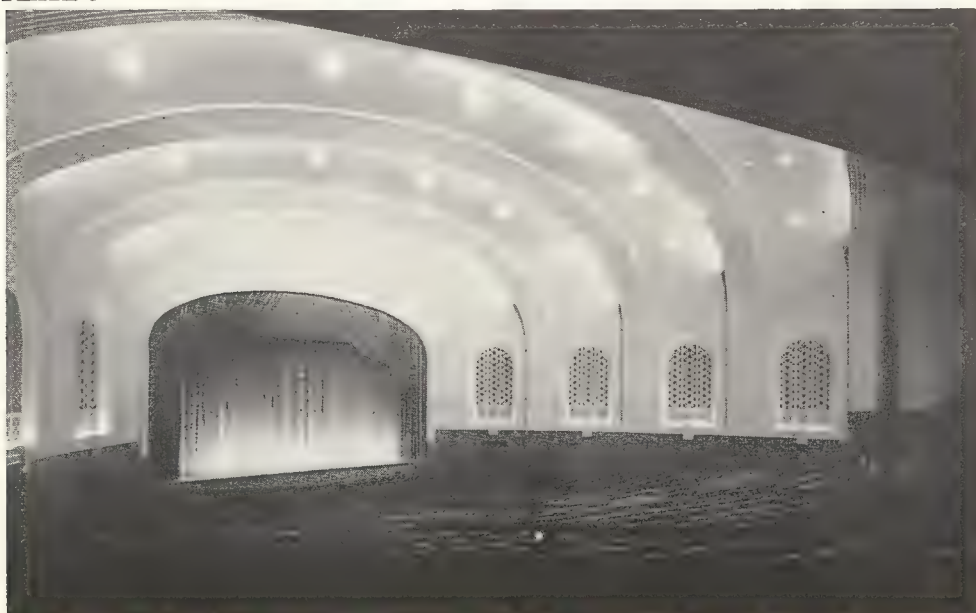






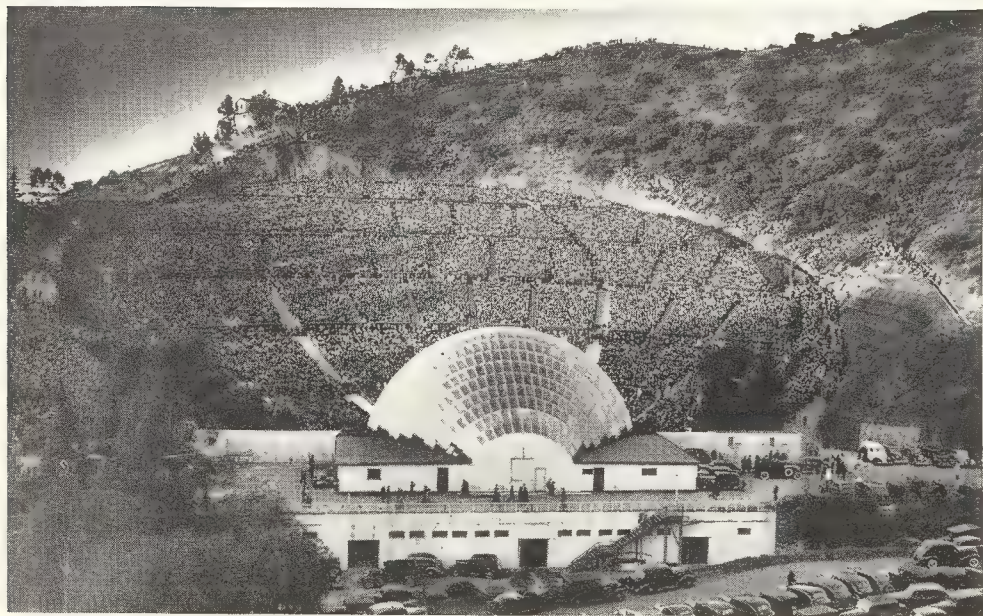
PLATE 10

### The Boboli Gardens in Florence

Both Europe and America have outdoor theaters of huge capacities

### The Hollywood Bowl

PLATE 11



THE tradition of grand opera scenery dates from the baroque European court productions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Conceived on a lavish scale to reflect the glamour of opera's aristocratic sponsors, the scenery was executed in the technique of perspective picture painting by means of two-dimensional "wings," "borders," and "backdrops." Candle and oil lamps, placed in corresponding rows, illuminated the sets. American grand opera companies, ignoring potential technical improvements, imported and have retained this tradition of baroque scenery. (Plates 12 through 17.)

Baroque scenery by Giuseppe Galli-Bibbiena (1696-1756)

PLATE 12

NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

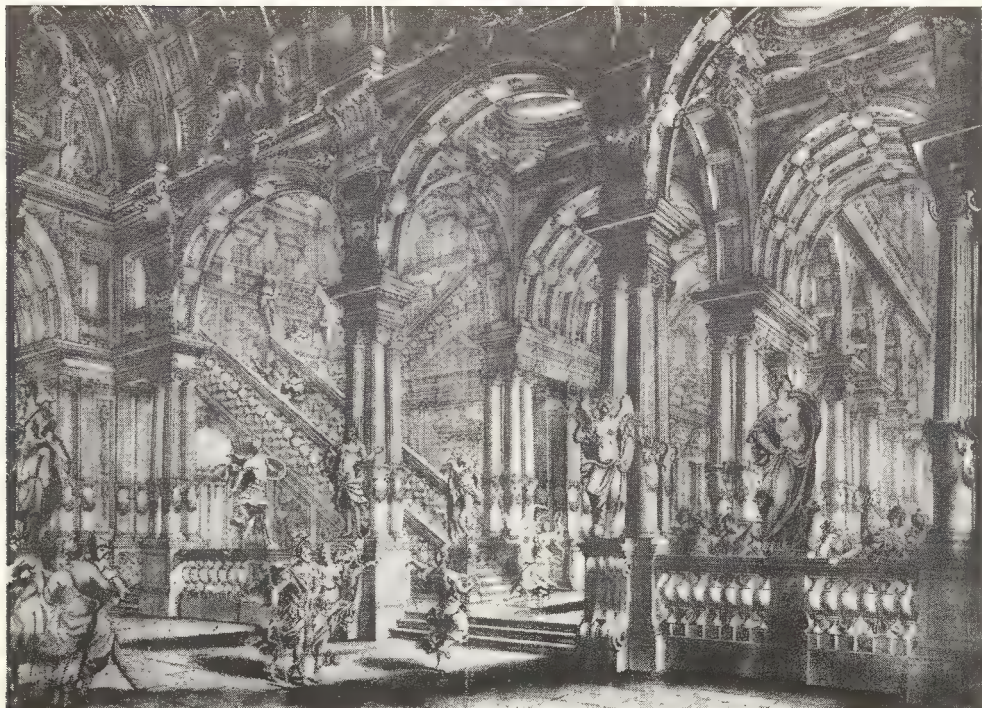






PLATE 13

AUSTRIAN NATIONAL LIBRARY, VIENNA

Karl Friedrich Schinkel's scenery for *The Magic Flute* (II, 1) in 1816

Scenery for *Tannhäuser* (I, 2) by A. Brioschi

PLATE 14

AUSTRIAN NATIONAL LIBRARY, VIENNA





PLATE 15

METROPOLITAN OPERA (WHITE STUDIO PHOTO)

Scenery by Angelo Parravicini for *Aida* at the Metropolitan





PLATE 16

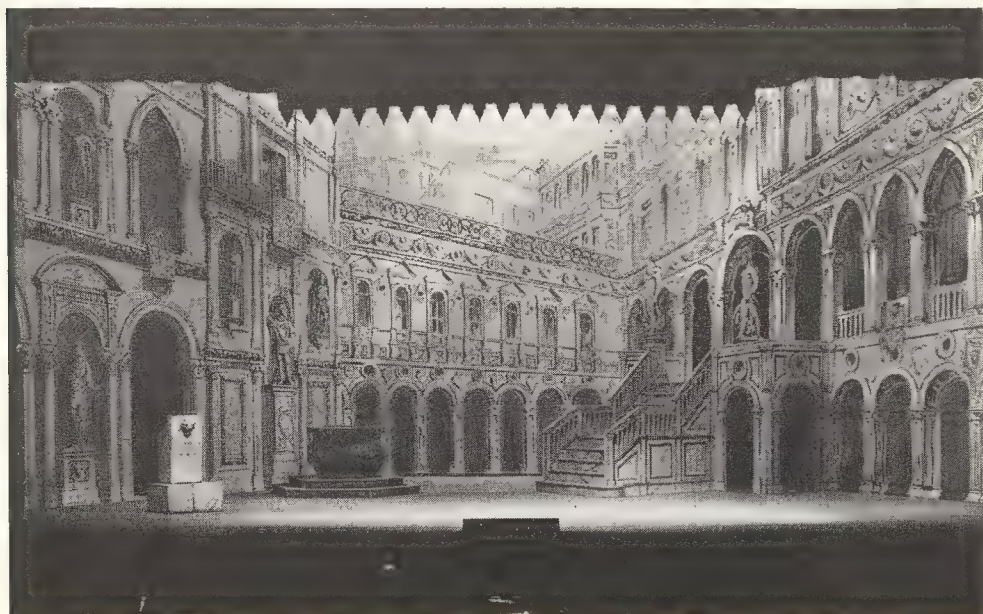
METROPOLITAN OPERA (WIDE WORLD PHOTO)

Scenery by Matislav Dobujinsky for *The Masked Ball* at the Metropolitan, 1940

Scenery for *La Gioconda* designed by Armando Agnini and Eugene B. Dunkel  
for the San Francisco Opera, 1947

PLATE 17

SAN FRANCISCO OPERA ASSOCIATION



THE realism introduced by Wagner and the development of a three-dimensional stage technique caused European scenic artists to advance in two directions: toward symbolic stylization by means of space and lighting (here Appia led the way) and toward a new realistic treatment that required ample stage space and modern technical equipment for moving constructed sets. (Plates 18 through 25.)

Design for *Lohengrin* (Act II) by Adolphe Appia

From Appia, 56 Reproductions, published by the Art  
Institute in Zurich, 1929

PLATE 18

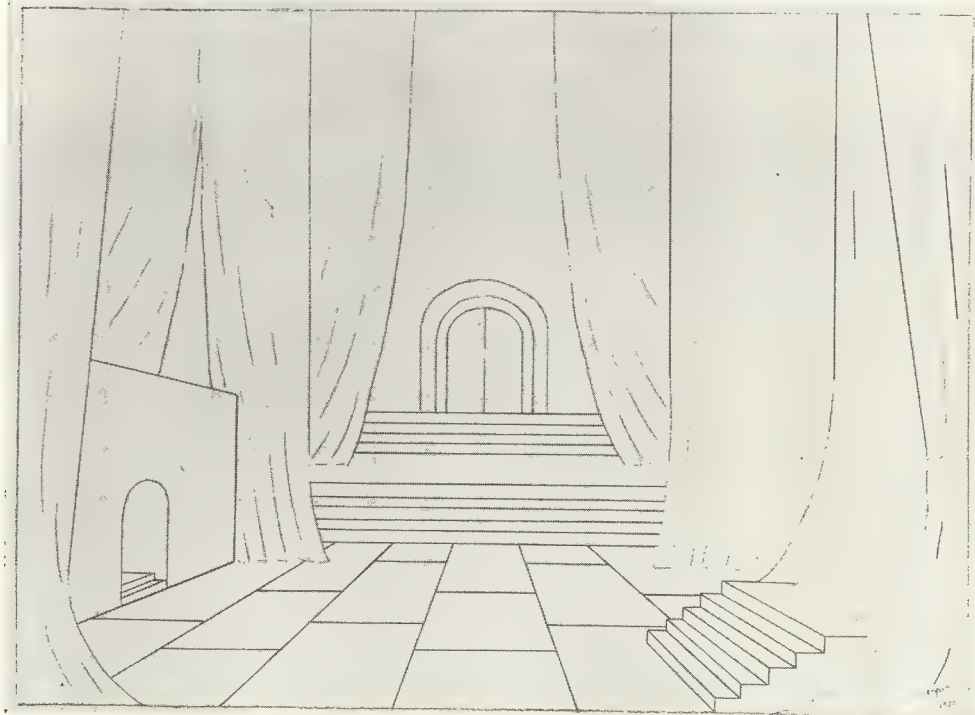




PLATE 19

LUDWIG SIEVERT

Design for *Salome* by Ludwig Sievert, 1925

Design for *Wozzeck* by Panos Aravantinos, 1925

PLATE 20







PLATE 21

Design for *Mosé* (Act I) by Nicola Benois

MUSEO TEATRALE ALLA SCALA, MILAN



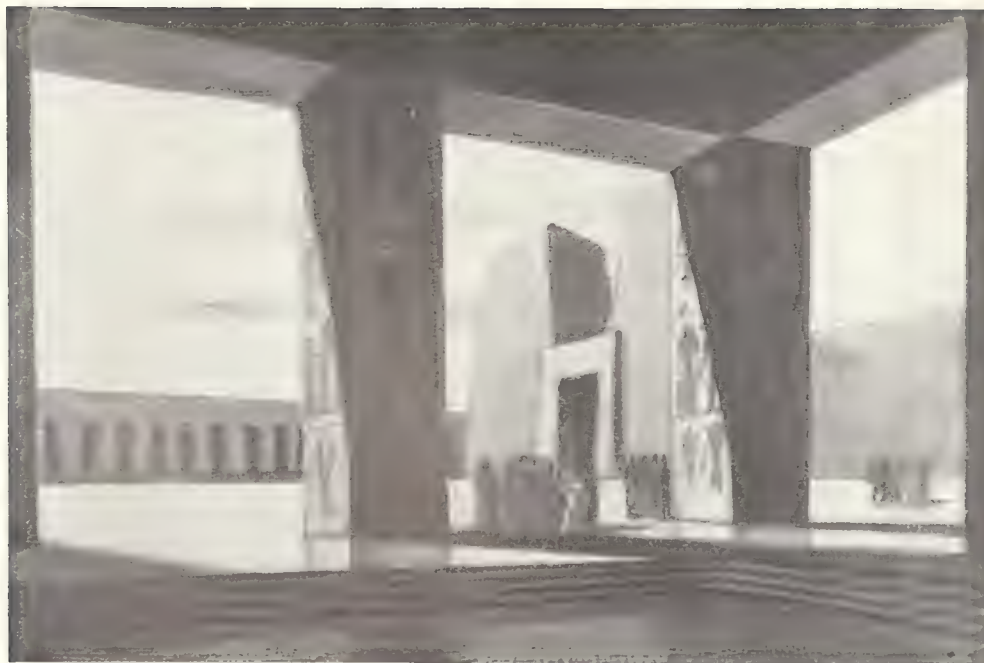


PLATE 22

TEATRO COMUNALE, FLORENCE

Design for *Mosé* by Pietro Aschieri, 1935

Design for *Rigoletto* by C. E. Oppo, 1934

PLATE 23

TEATRO COMUNALE, FLORENCE





PLATE 24

TEATRO COMUNALE, FLORENCE

Curtain for Monteverdi's *Orfeo* by Giorgio de Chirico, 1949

Design for *Salome* by Salvador Dali, 1949

PLATE 25

ROYAL OPERA HOUSE, COVENT GARDEN, LONDON



IN AMERICA some set designers, still imbued with the older European tradition of operatic scenery, are struggling valiantly to find an acceptable compromise between the old stage techniques and equipment that still prevail in this country and the newer ideas of scenic design that have taken hold in Europe. (Plates 26 through 32.)

Scenery for *Parsifal* (Temple, scene 1) by Joseph Urban, Metropolitan, 1920

PLATE 26

MRS. JOSEPH URBAN

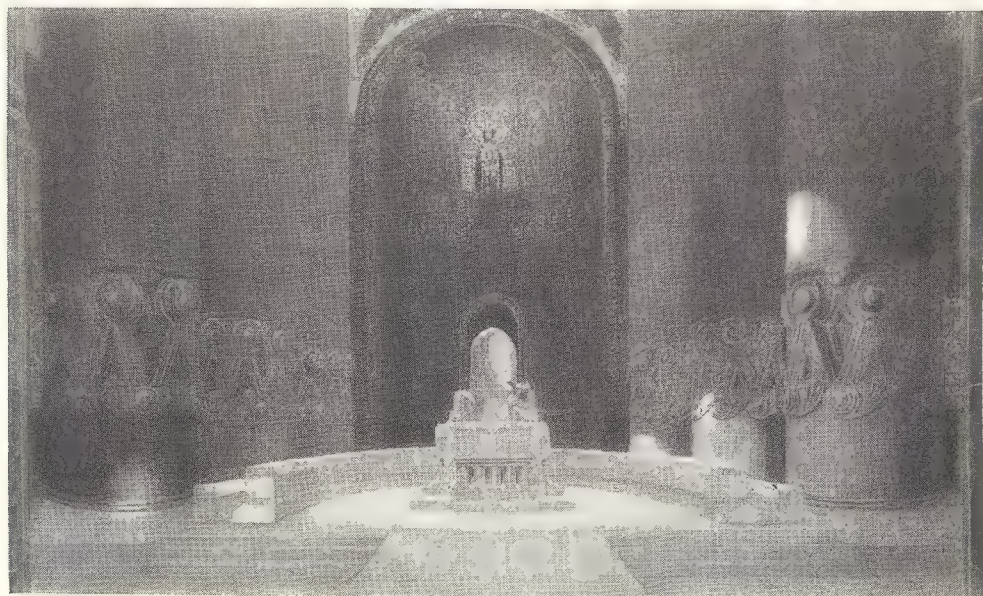






PLATE 27

SAN FRANCISCO OPERA ASSOCIATION

Harry Horner, scenery for *Fidelio* (I), San Francisco Opera, 1937

Jonel Jorgulesco, scenery for *The Marriage of Figaro* (II), Metropolitan, 1940

PLATE 28

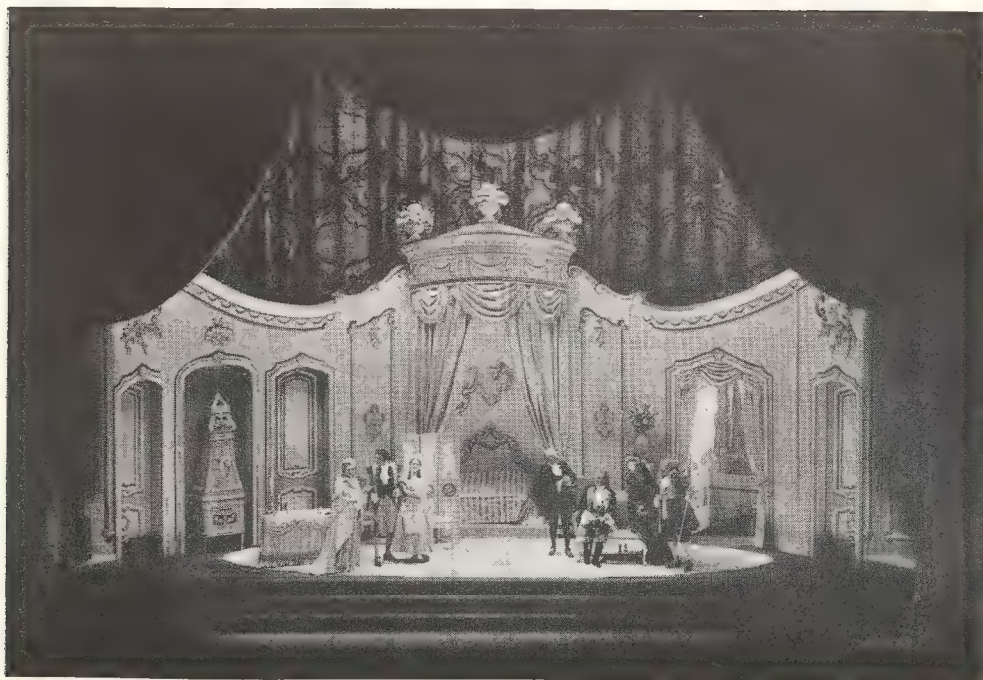






PLATE 29

WIDE WORLD PHOTO

Richard Rychtarik, scenery for *Alceste*, Metropolitan, 1941

Lee Simonson, design for *Das Rheingold* (scene 2), Metropolitan, 1948

PLATE 30

PETER A. JULY PHOTO





PLATE 31

METROPOLITAN OPERA (LOUIS MELANCON PHOTO)

Krehan-Crayon, drawing for *Manon Lescaut* (III), Metropolitan, 1949

Rolf Gerard, drawing for *Don Carlo* (III), Metropolitan, 1950

PLATE 32

METROPOLITAN OPERA (SEGE LEBLANG PHOTO)



Other American designers, less bound by tradition and unwilling to confine the huge concept of grand opera within the limitations of the old stage technique, have found a solution in symbolic treatment and stylization. (Plates 32 through 37.)

Norman Bel Geddes, drawing for *Pelléas and Mélisande* (final scene)

PLATE 33

NORMAN BEL GEDDES





PLATE 34

JO MIELZINER

Jo Mielziner, design for *Emperor Jones* (throne room), Metropolitan, 1933

Donald Oenslager, design for *Fidelio*, Central City Opera Festival, 1947

PLATE 35

DONALD OENSLAGER

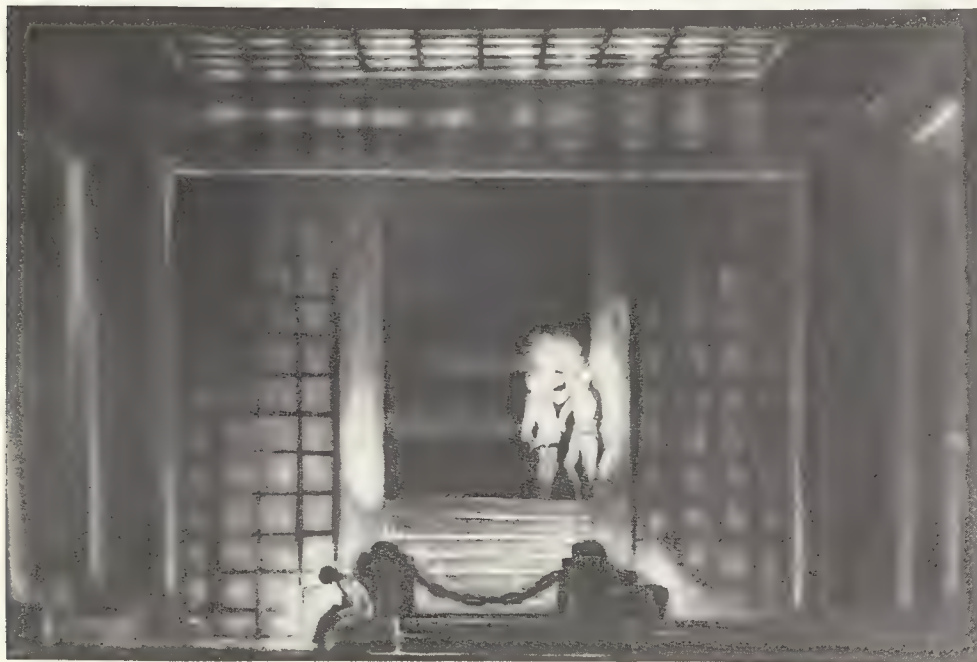






PLATE 36

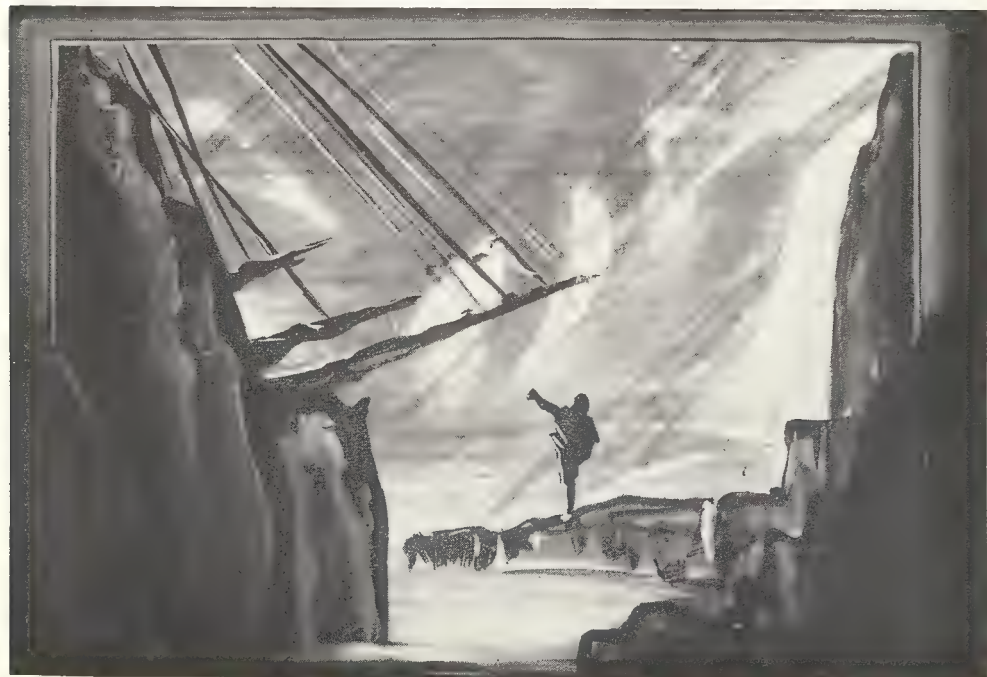
ROBERT EDMOND JONES

Robert Edmond Jones, design for the Hades scene in Gluck's *Orfeo*,  
Central City Opera Festival, 1941

Robert Edmond Jones, design for *The Flying Dutchman*, Metropolitan, 1950

PLATE 37

ROBERT EDMOND JONES



*OPERATIC tradition, in its true sense, is not identical with sterile imitation of productions of the past. It is a living tradition, renewable and renewed. At Bayreuth (Plates 38 through 40) and at La Scala (Plates 41 and 42) new productions through the years have adapted their settings to the ideas and tastes of succeeding generations.*

*Die Götterdämmerung, Act II, at Bayreuth (Plates 38, 39, 40)*

The original scenery by Max Brückner, 1876

PLATE 38



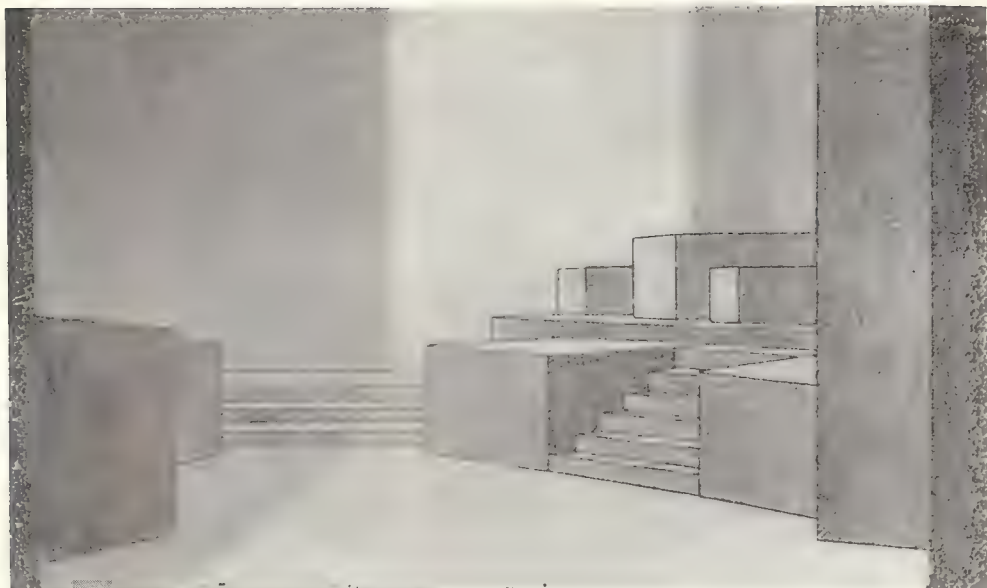


PLATE 39

Adolphe Appia's design, 1925

From Appia, *56 Reproductions*, published by the Art Institute in Zurich, 1929

Emil Preetorius' design, 1933

From Preetorius, *Das Szenische Werk*, Berlin, 1941-43

PLATE 40







PLATE 41

Carlo Ferrario's design, 1869

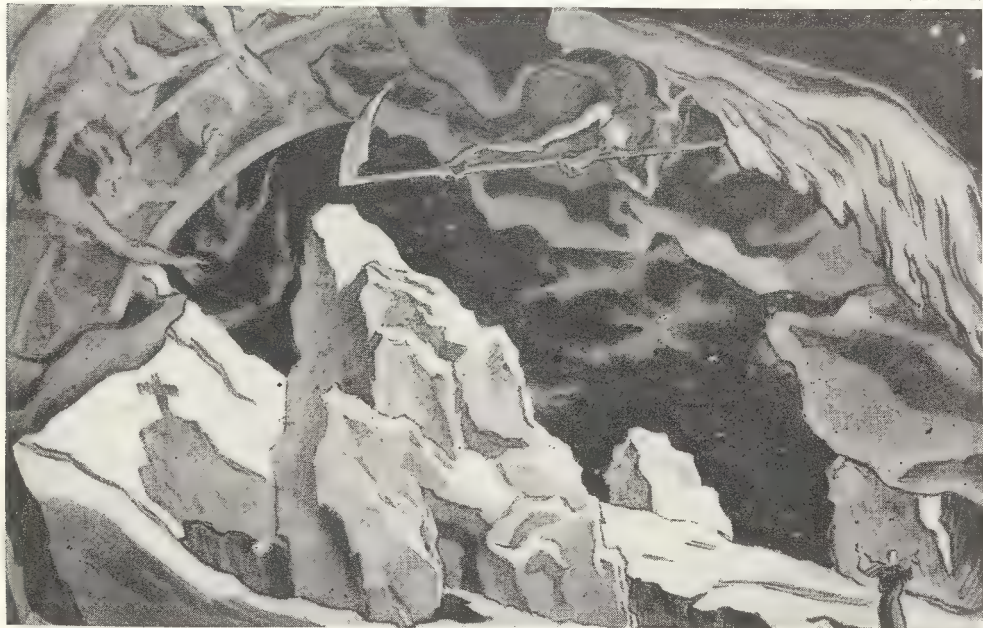
From Joseph Gregor, *Kulturgeschichte der Oper*, Zurich, 1941

*La Forza del Destino*, last scene, at La Scala

Nicola Benois' design, 1950

PLATE 42

TEATRO LA SCALA, MILAN





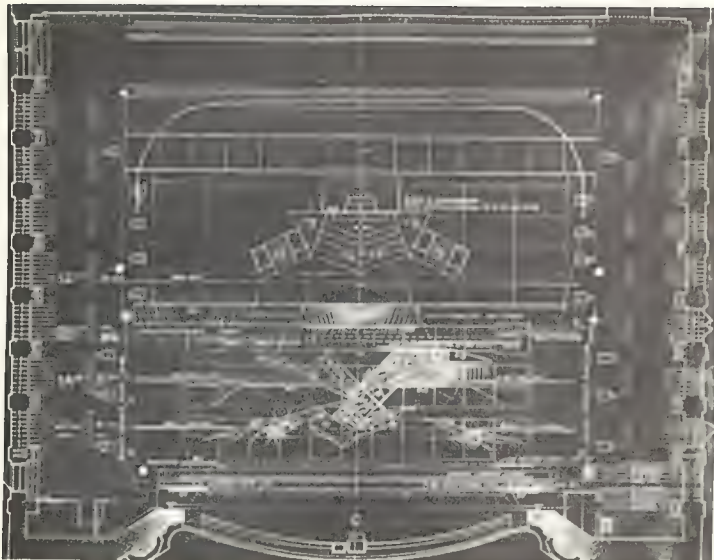


PLATE 43

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, NEW YORK

The ground plan for set and action

WHEN the scenic details, including the action, of a new production have been worked out, the designer prepares exact ground plans and drawings to scale for each scene, and the stage director prepares the "Director's Score" page by page. He interleaves the printed score of the opera with white sheets on which he notes down every detail, including curtain and



PLATE 44

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, NEW YORK

The scale drawing of the scenery

lighting cues as well as the entrances, action, and exits of the singers, correlating all these carefully with the music. Plates 43 through 45 illustrate these processes for *The Magic Flute*, Act I, scene 1, at the Metropolitan. The ground plan and drawing to scale are by Richard Rychtarik, the director's score by Herbert Graf.

## Act I

Rough, rocky landscape

A

B.

## SCENE I

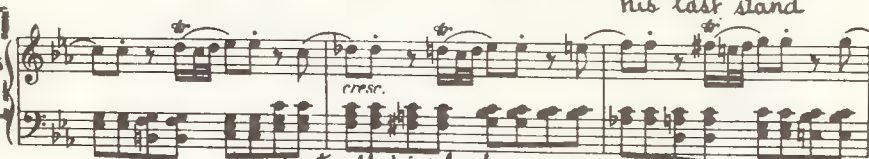
## No. 1. Introduction

CURTAIN CUES  
AND OTHER  
TECHNICAL  
CHANGESLIGHTING  
CUESENTRANCE  
CUES OF  
PERSONSCHANGES  
OF  
POSITIONS  
OF  
PERSONS

Allegro

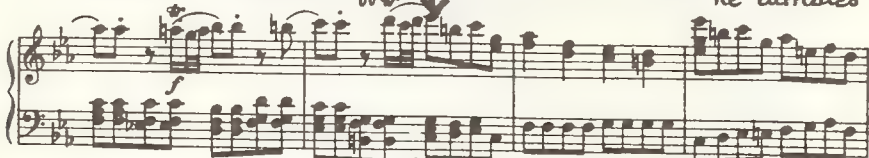
ENTRANCE  
TAMINO

his last stand



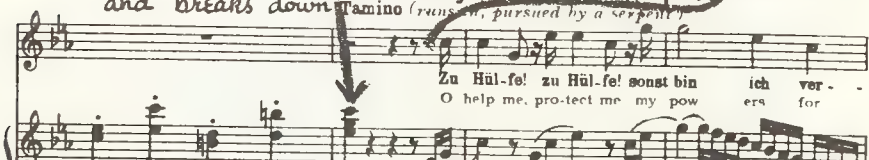
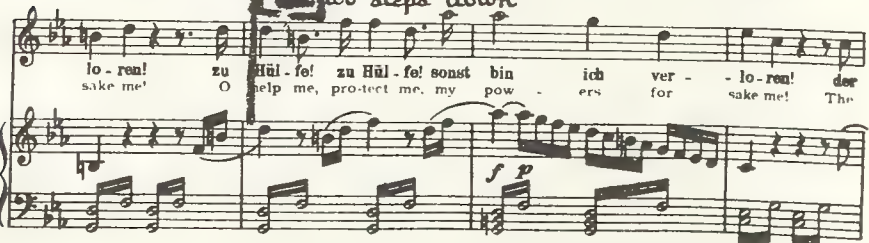
he shoots off his last arrow

he tumbles



and breaks down Tamino (runs on, pursued by a serpent)

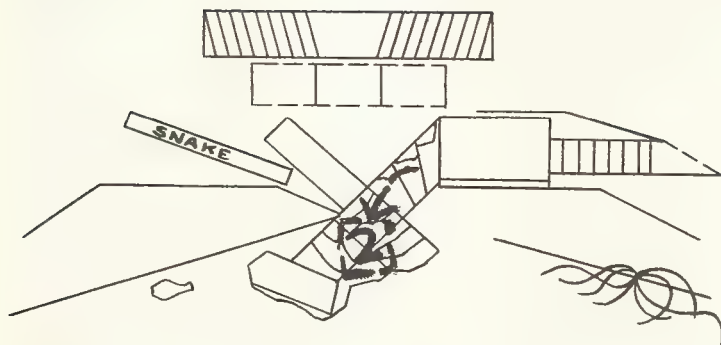
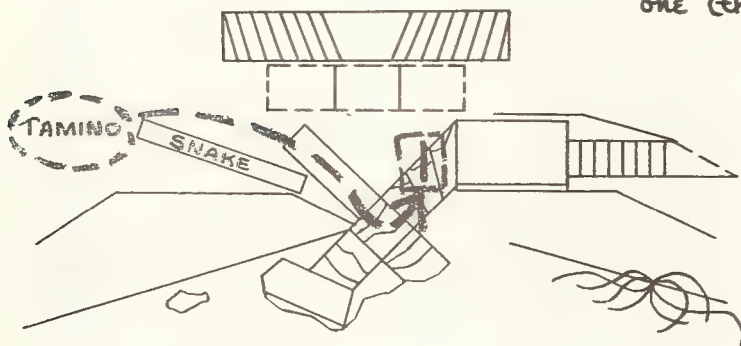
calling to one side (right):

Zu Hül-fe! zu Hül-fe! sonst bin ich ver-  
O help me, pro-tect me my pow ers forTAMINO getting up and coming  
two steps downlo - ren! zu Hül - fe! zu Hül - fe! sonst bin ich ver - - lo - ren! der  
sake me! O help me, pro-tect me, my pow - ers for - sake me! Tho-

[A] TRAVELLER  
= Curtain up, fast.

(OPENING LIGHT) SET.

[1] ENTRANCE TAMINO  
running, with bow and  
one (the last) arrow



The music opposite and this white interleaf make up the first page of the director's score

The music is reproduced from the score of *The Magic Flute*  
published by G. Schirmer, Inc., copyright 1941



PLATE 46

The first Rhine-daughters, Bayreuth, 1876  
 From Ernst Bücken, *Richard Wagner*, Potsdam, 1933

The flower maidens in *Parsifal*, at the Metropolitan, 1920

PLATE 47

METROPOLITAN OPERA (WHITE STUDIO PHOTO)





Costuming yesterday—and today, streamlined (Plates 46 through 49)

PLATE 48



PLATE 49

Ezio Pinza as Don Giovanni

Lily Pons as the Daughter of the Regiment



PLATE 50

Première of Britten's *Rape of Lucretia* at Glyndebourne, staged by  
Eric Crozier and designed by John Piper

All the details fuse at last in a performance of spirit and beauty

Miguel Bernal's *Tata Vasco* as staged and designed by Julio Prieto  
for the Opera de Bellas Artes in Mexico City

PLATE 51



IT IS in the legitimate theaters of Broadway that during recent years a real American folk opera has been growing from the soil of the musical theater. Here opera is stepping down from the castles of the gods and the courts of Florentine nobles to the homes of the people in twentieth-century America. But the word opera is often avoided on the programs in favor of a variety of other terms that disguise the real nature of the works. They are operas just the same, no matter what they are called. (Plates 52 through 55.)

Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*, 1935 (director: Rouben Mamoulian;  
designer: Serge Soudeikine)

PLATE 52

VANDAMM PHOTO







PLATE 53

ELLEN DARBY PHOTO

Hammerstein's *Carmen Jones*, 1943 (director: Hassart Short; designer: Howard Bay)

Menotti's *The Medium*, 1947 (designer: Horace Armistead)

PLATE 54

GIAN-CARLO MENOTTI







PLATE 35

DWIGHT DEERE WILMAN (PETER A. JULY PHOTO)

*Weill's Street Scene, 1947* (designer: Jo Mielziner)



PLATE 56

*Carmen* in Flint, Michigan, 1948

*CIVIC opera companies have sprung up in scores of American communities in the last decade. Working with limited means but a great deal of enthusiasm, some of them are amateurish in their productions, others truly professional; some are*

*Samson and Delilah* by the New Orleans Opera Association, 1948

PLATE 57

LEON TRICE PHOTO





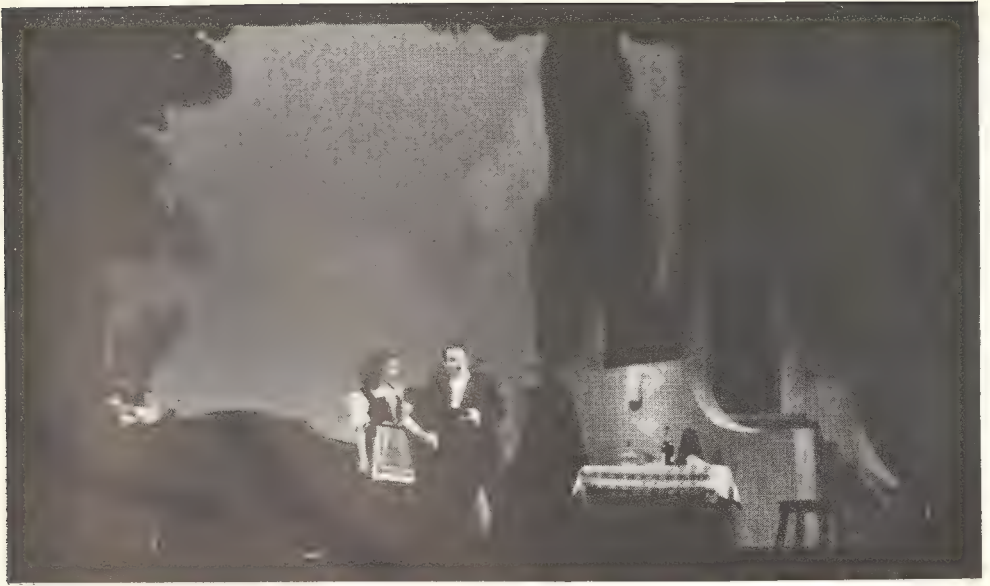


PLATE 58

ALFREDO VALENTI

*Fra Diavolo* by the Chautauqua Opera Association (director: Alfredo Valenti)

*imitative of tradition, others creative and forward-looking. Out of this diversity in aims, methods, and programs are emerging the patterns for an indigenous people's opera in America. (Plates 56 through 67.)*

*Aïda* by the Pittsburgh Opera, 1947 (director: Armando Agnini)

PLATE 59

HORNBECK PHOTO



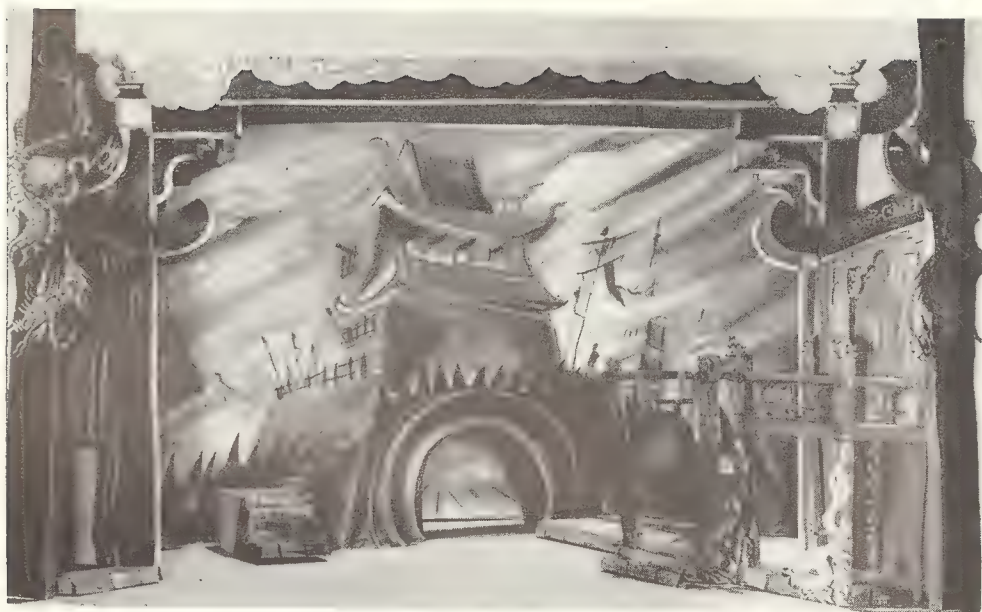


PLATE 60

COSMO-SILEO PHOTO BY MANCUSO

*Turandot* by the New York City Opera Company (director: Vladimir Rosing; designer: H. A. Condell)

*Die Meistersinger* by the New York City Opera Company (director: Otto Erhardt; designer: H. A. Condell)

PLATE 61

COSMO-SILEO PHOTO BY MANCUSO







PLATE 62

*La Bohème* by the American Opera Company of Philadelphia  
(designer: H. A. Condell)

*Albert Herring* by the New England Opera Theater in Boston  
(director: Boris Goldovsky; designer: Charles Elson)

PLATE 63

WHITESTONE PHOTO





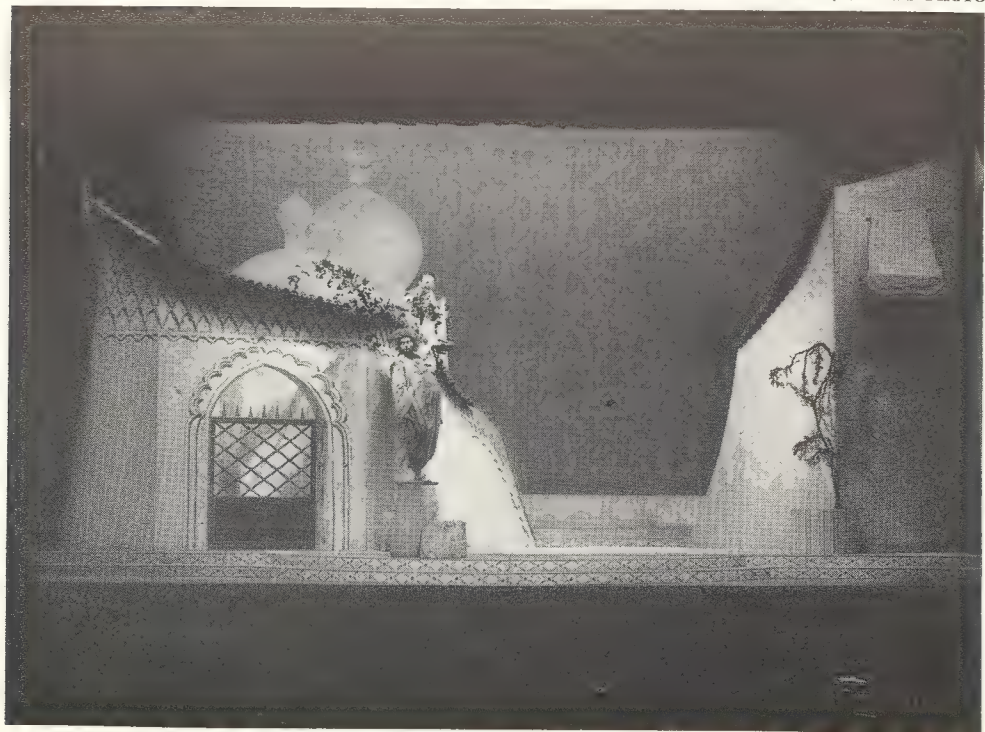
PLATE 64

*Down in the Valley* by the Lemonade Opera Company in New York  
(director: Max Leavitt)

*The Abduction from the Seraglio* by the Guild Opera Company in  
Los Angeles (director: Carl Ebert; designer: Rolf Gerard)

PLATE 65

FRANCIS J. GRANDY PHOTO





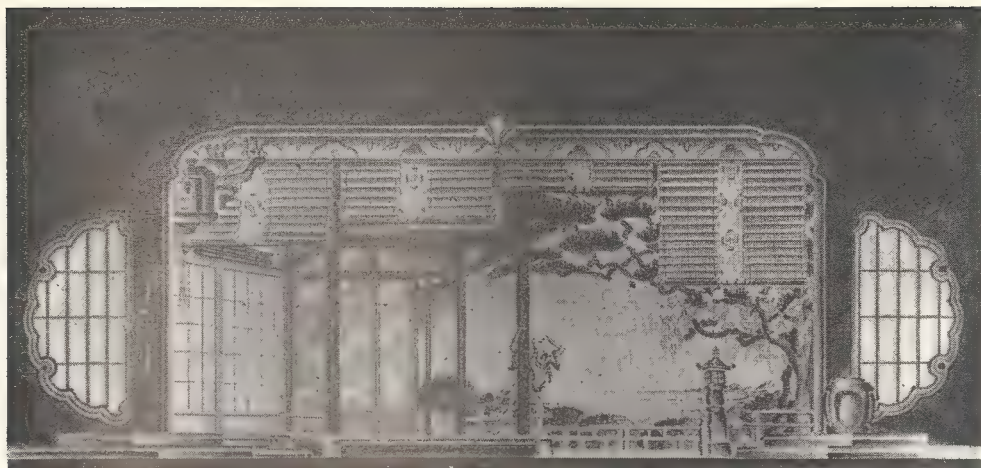
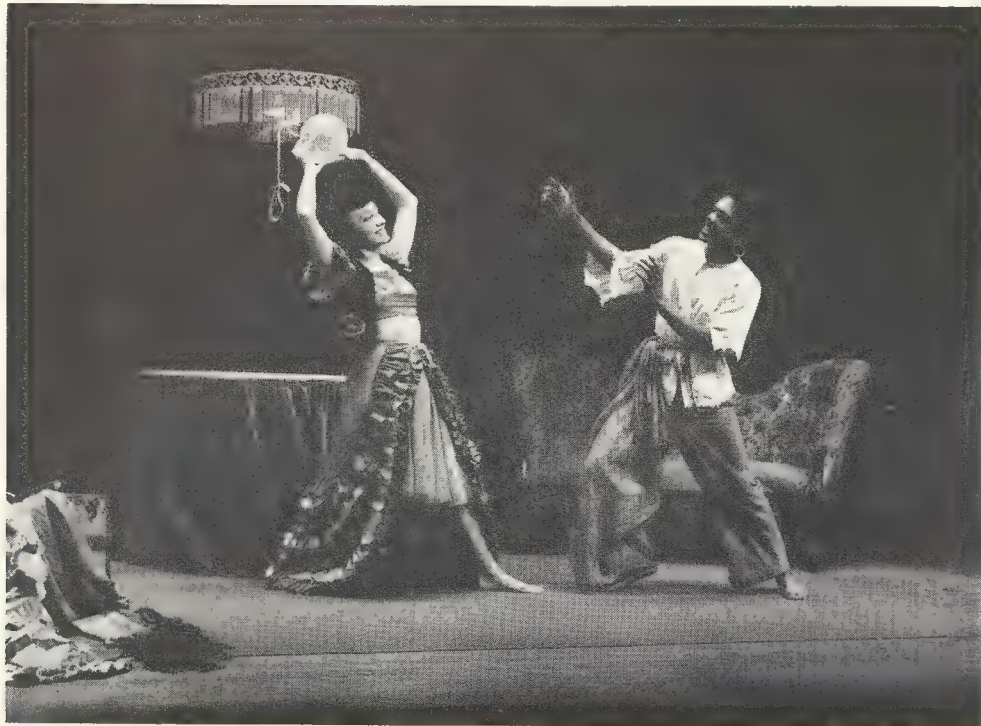


PLATE 66

*Madame Butterfly* at the Central City Opera Festival, 1950  
(designer: Elmer Nagy)

*The Medium* by the Karamu House Lyric Theatre in Cleveland  
(director: Benno D. Frank)

PLATE 67



IN THE opera workshops of colleges, universities, and schools of music, more than anywhere else, the agents and tools for the new American opera are being prepared. They provide the opportunities otherwise lacking in America for the practical experience of young operatic artists. On their stages modern production methods can be adequately applied and experimentation toward the development of new methods undertaken. They also offer the principal chance of performance for new works by contemporary composers and older works not in the standard repertoire. (Plates 68 through 79.)

*Peter Grimes* at Stanford University (musical director: Jan Popper;  
stage director: F. Cowles Strickland; designer: Wendell Cole)

PLATE 68

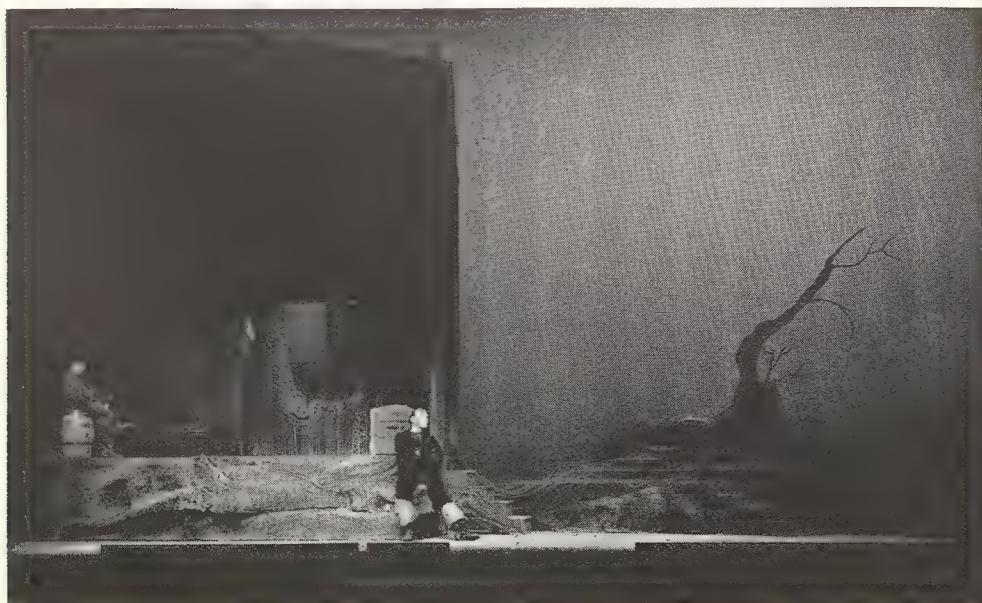






PLATE 69

*Madame Butterfly* at Fisk University, Nashville, Tennessee

*The Mother of Us All* at the University of Denver (directors:  
Virginia Sledge, Waldo Williamson, Roi White)

PLATE 70





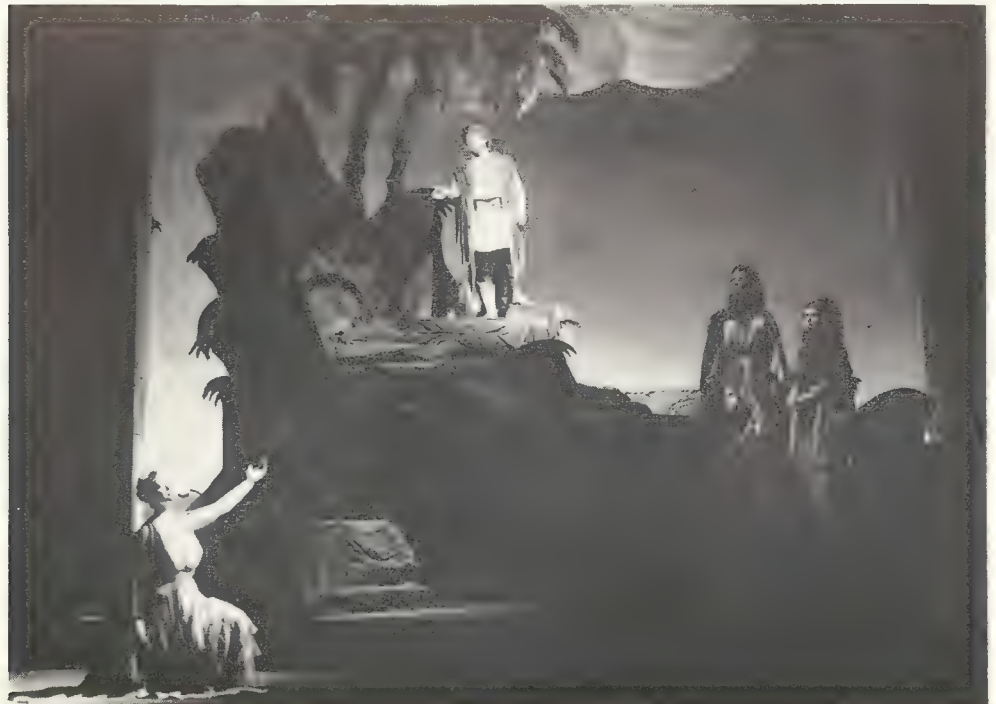
PLATE 71

DOROTHY CONWAY PHOTO

*Dido and Aeneas* at the University of Washington in Seattle (musical director: Stanley Chapple; stage director: Ralph Rosinbum; designer: John Ashby Conway)

*Ariadne auf Naxos* at the University of Southern California (director: Carl Ebert; conductor: Wolfgang Martin)

PLATE 72



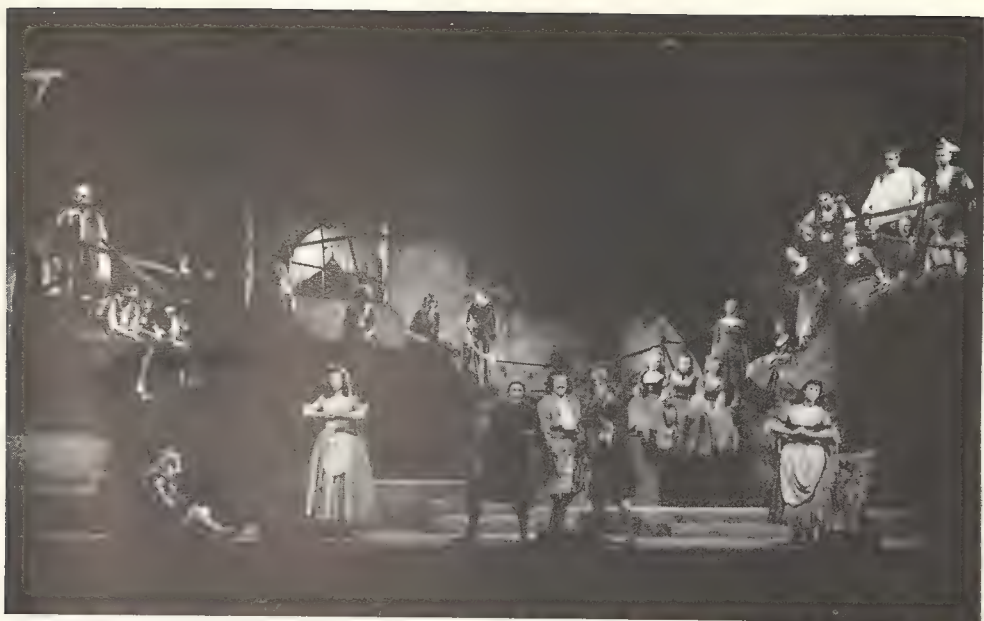


PLATE 73

*The Beggar's Opera* (Britten) at the University of California at Los Angeles (musical director: Jan Popper; stage director: Henry Schnitzler; designer: William Hricz)

*Giants in the Earth* at Columbia University (musical director: Willard Rhodes; stage director: Felix Brentano; librettist: Arnold Sundgaard)

PLATE 74

DOUGLAS MOORE







PLATE 76

RICHARD RYCHTARIK

*Peter Grimes* at the Berkshire Music Center (musical director: Leonard Bernstein; stage director: Eric Crozier; designer: Richard Rychtarik)

*The Beggar's Opera* (Britten) at the Juilliard Opera Theatre (musical director: Frederick Waldman; stage director: Frederic Cohen; designer: Frederick Kiesler)

PLATE 77

FRITZ HENLE PHOTO







PLATE 75

*Parsifal* at the University of Indiana at Bloomington (stage director: Hans Busch; conductor: Ernst Hoffman)



PLATE 78

*Carmen* by the All Children's Grand Opera in Chicago (director:  
Zerline Muhlmann-Metzger)

*Hänsel and Gretel* by the students of McDonough High School in New Orleans

PLATE 79

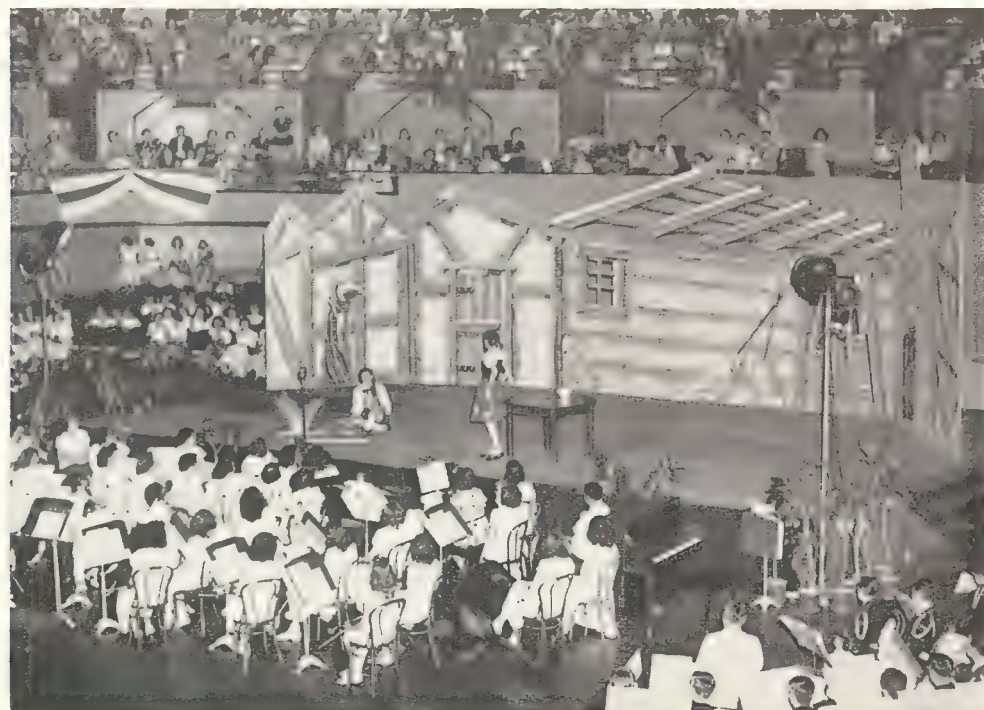




PLATE 80

Grace Moore in a scene from *Madame Butterfly* in the motion picture  
*One Night of Love* (Columbia Pictures, 1934)

THE motion picture, with all its visual variety, is an ideal medium for the production of opera. But American film producers, afraid to risk continuous singing with audiences accustomed to the photographic realism of Hollywood, have, at least since the advent of sound, confined themselves largely to using operatic excerpts and Metropolitan artists as garnishes in "musicals." (Plates 80 through 85.)





PLATE 81

A scene from *La Traviata* produced by Gregor Rabinovitch under the title *The Lost One* (Columbia Pictures)





PLATE 82

Two scenes from *Faust* on the screen, with Italo Tajo as Mephistopheles,  
produced by Gregor Rabinovitch (Columbia Pictures)

PLATE 83





PLATE 84

*The Barber of Seville* on film, with Tito Gobbi, Ferruccio Tagliavini,  
and Nelly Corradi (Excelsior Pictures)

A scene from *Il Trovatore* on the screen (Globe Films)

PLATE 85





TELEVISION promises to do for opera what radio has done for concert music: introduce it to a huge new audience of potential lovers of the art. It can carry a single performance to millions, more than have seen even the most popular opera in all its previous performances. Television presents new and difficult technical problems and demands new methods of production that respect the limitations and make use of the advantages of the camera technique, but it can be the most decisive medium for forcing opera to take off its top hat and enter the American home.

A telecast of *Hänsel and Gretel* from Station WRGB, Schenectady, 1943 (Julius Hartt production by Elmer Nagy; Robert Stone, television director)

PLATE 86



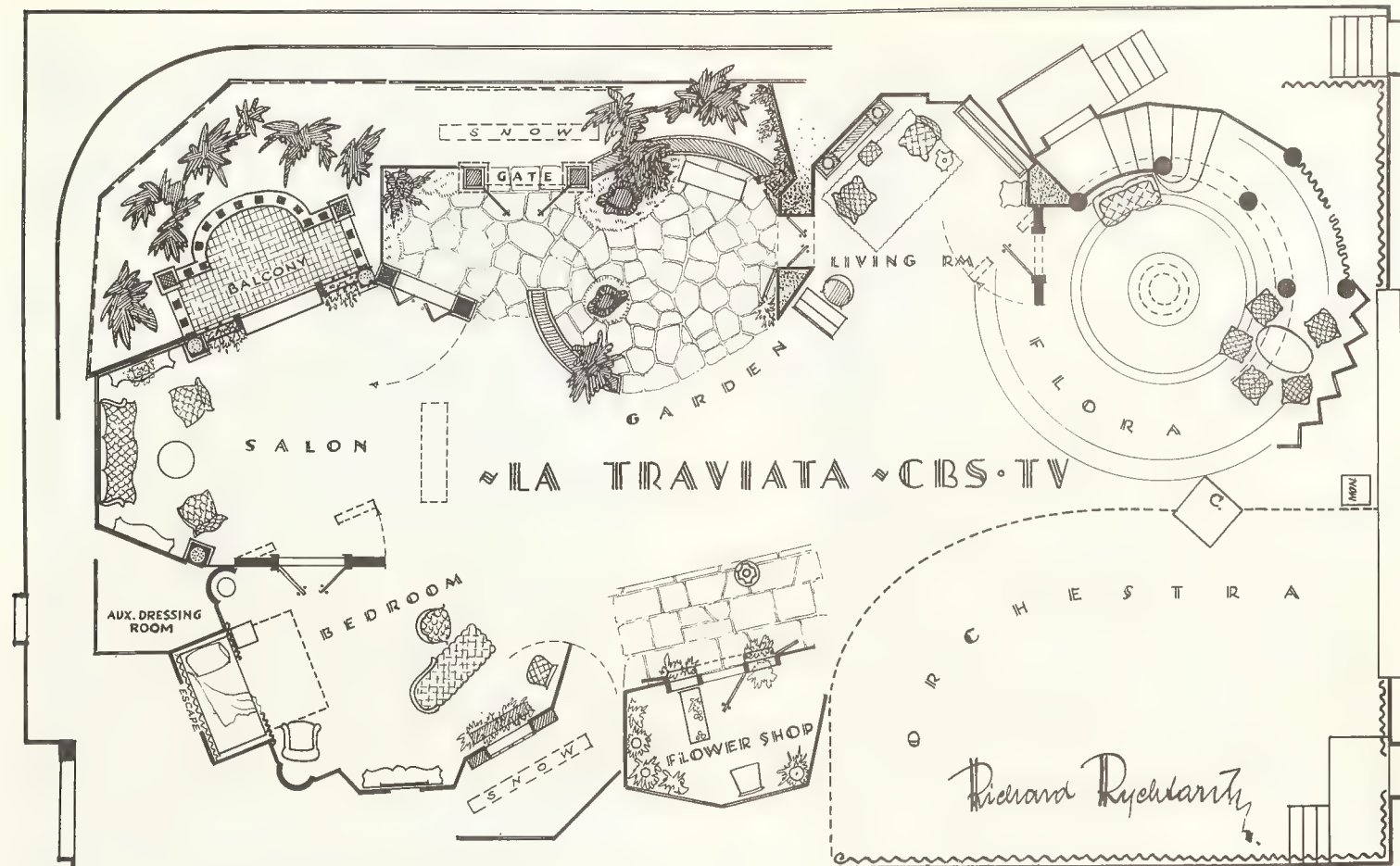
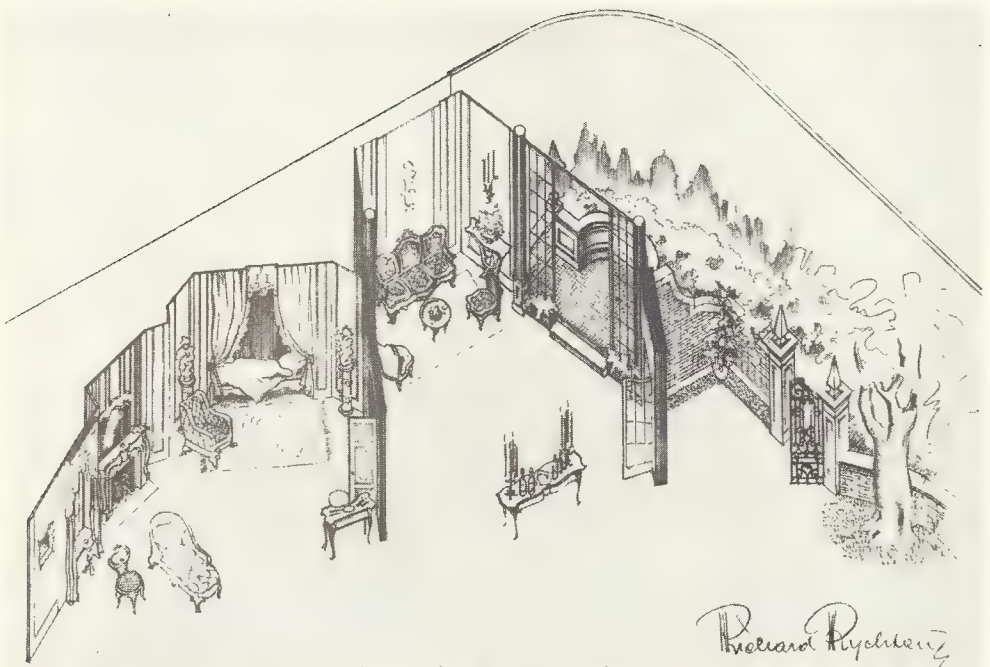


PLATE 87

The ground plan showing the studio layout of seven sets and the position of the orchestra

Plans for a studio telecast of *La Traviata*, staged by Herbert Graf and designed by Richard Rychtarik, in a Henry Souvaine production at CBS-Television, New York, 1950 (Plates 87 through 89)





VIOLETTA'S ROOMS - ISOMETRIC PERSPECTIVE

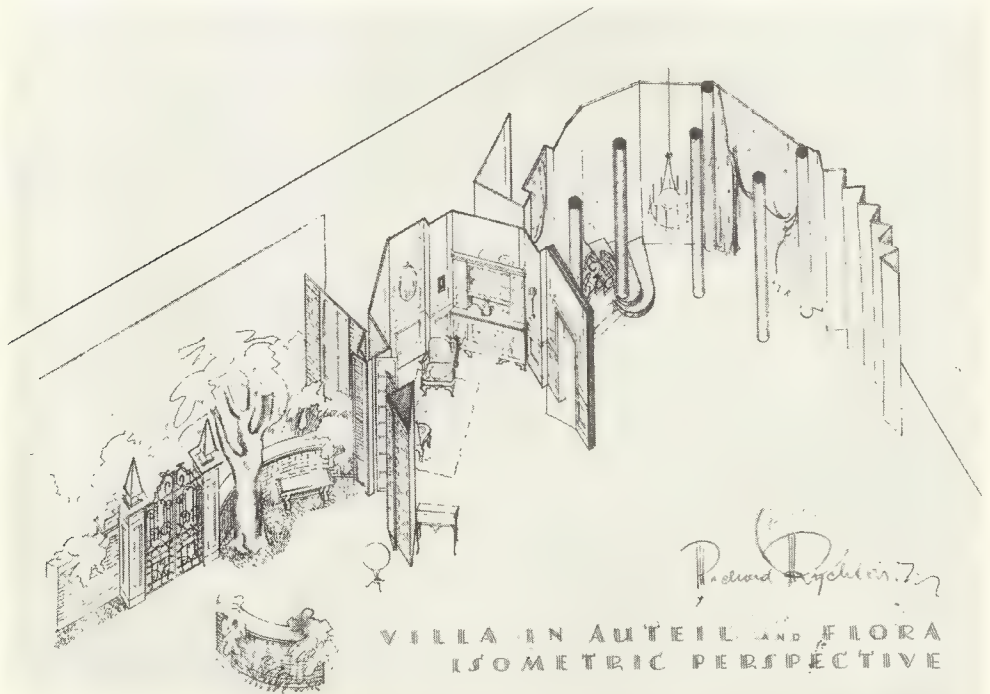
PLATE 88

RICHARD RYCHTARIK

The isometric perspective of six of the sets (first half above, second half below)

PLATE 89

RICHARD RYCHTARIK



VILLA IN AUTEUIL AND FLORA  
ISOMETRIC PERSPECTIVE



PLATE 90

A scene from *La Bohème* telecast over NBC-Television, New York, 1944  
(director: Herbert Graf; designer: Robert J. Wade)

A scene from *Madame Butterfly* over NBC-Television, New York, 1950  
(producer: Samuel Chotzinoff; director: Charles Polachik)

PLATE 91



PLANS for a people's opera of the future inevitably include a building appropriately designed to serve the multiple purposes of a community music and drama center. Though many of the necessary features of such a building have been individually worked out by progressive architects, their ideas still remain largely plans on paper. And no opera theater combining all these features has even reached the blueprint stage as yet. Plans for such a theater should include technical devices already known, such as revolving, wagon, and elevator stages and equipment for projecting scenery, along with such other apparatus as architects and technicians, working with opera producers, may devise to solve the problems of opera production. (Plates 92 through 104.)

The main stage block of the proposed Los Angeles Music Center

PLATE 92

PEREIRA AND LUCKMAN

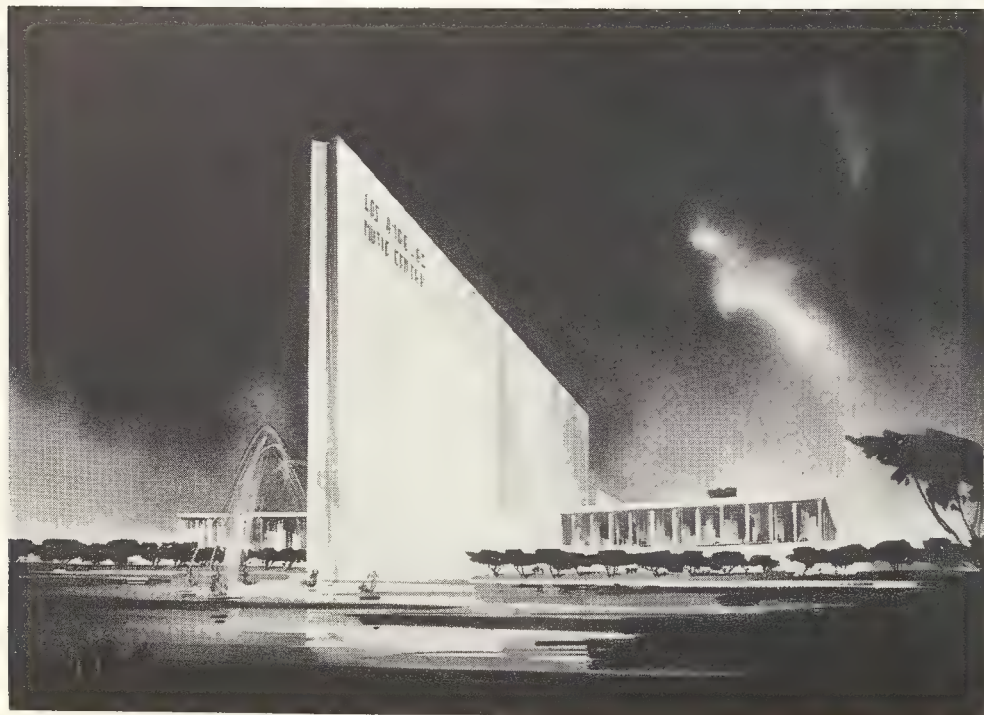






PLATE 93

PATON PRICE AND ASSOCIATES

Frank Lloyd Wright's model, with roof removed, for the New  
Theatre to be built in Hartford, Connecticut

Proposed Shapiro Memorial Art Theater for Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts

PLATE 94

SAARINEN, SAARINEN, AND ASSOCIATES





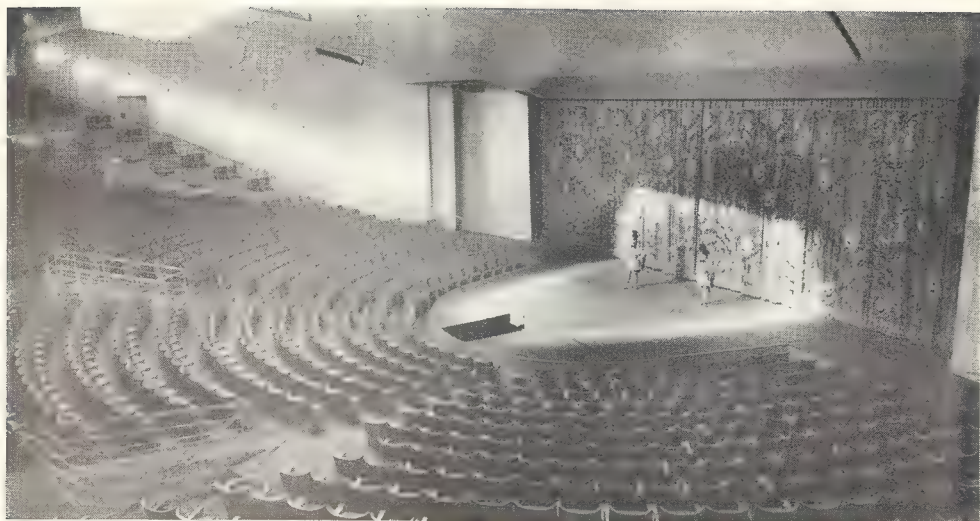


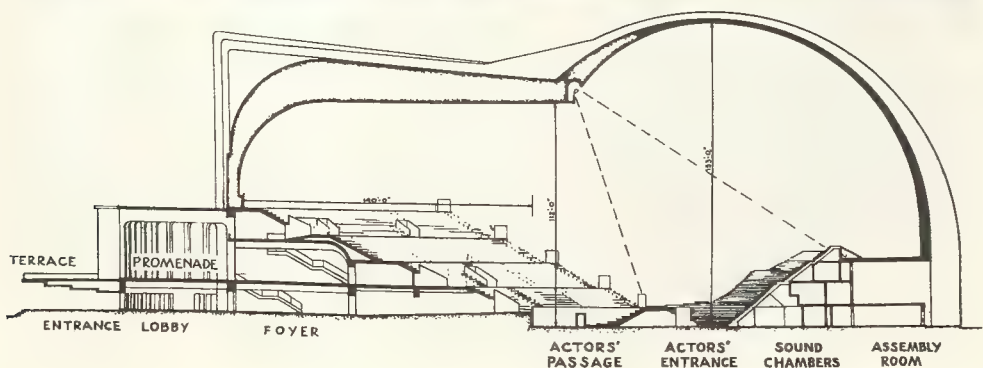
PLATE 95

AMERICAN-SWEDISH NEWS EXCHANGE, INC.

Breaking the proscenium frame: The auditorium of the City Theater in Malmö, Sweden (*above*), and two projects by Norman Bel Geddes (*below*): the auditorium and stage of the Intimate Theater, 1922, and the longitudinal section of the Divine Comedy Theater, 1929

PLATE 96

NORMAN BEL GEDDES



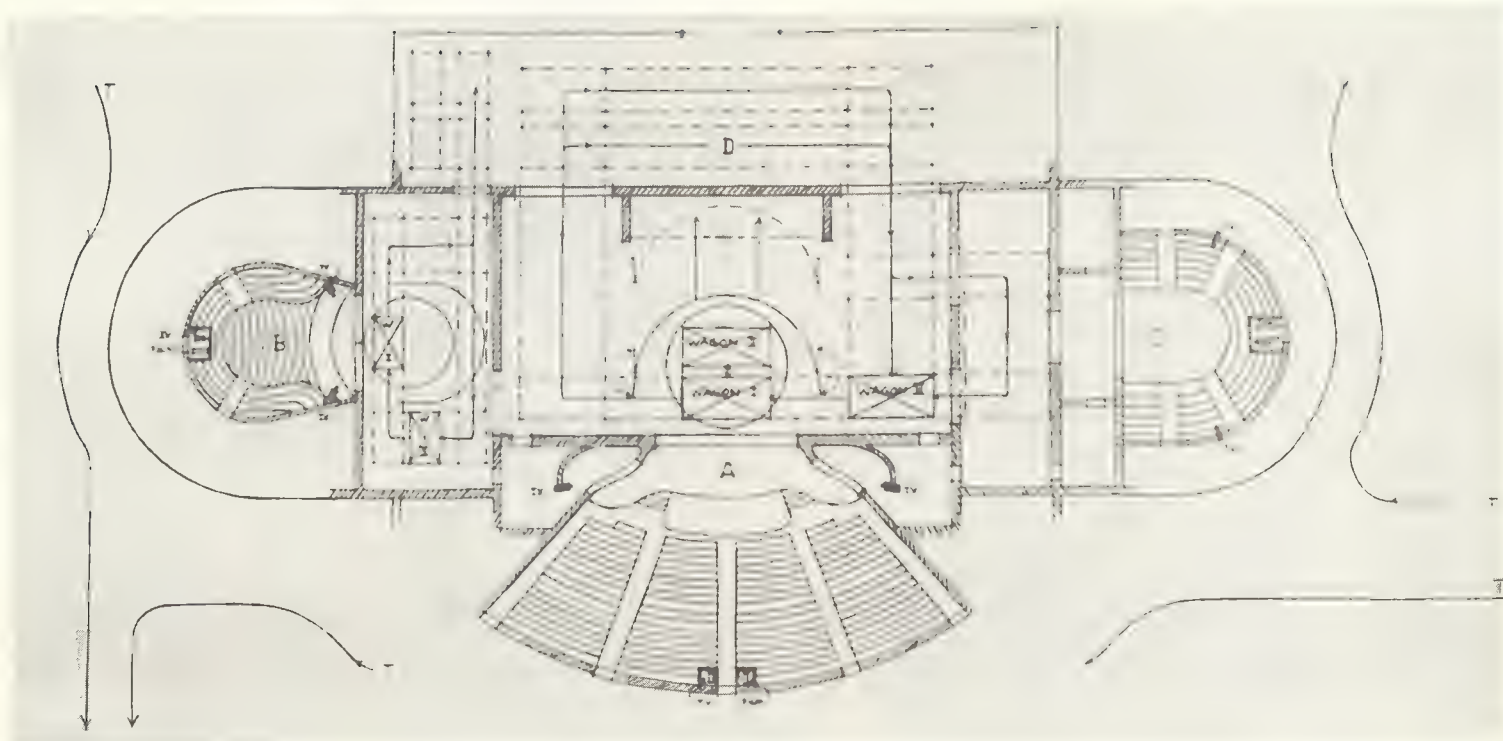


PLATE 97

Sketch of a Community Center Theater, according to the ideas of Herbert Graf

A is an opera and concert auditorium seating from 3000 to 4000. B is a theater hall seating about 1800. C is a chamber music and lecture hall seating about 750. D is the workroom and storage space designed to serve all three halls. A system of wagon stages of uniform size (rectangles marked Wagon I, II, and III for A and C and W I and W II for B) running on tracks (the dotted lines) and two revolving

stages (the full circles in A and B) is to be used for moving three-dimensional scenery, while cycloramas of solid material (the big half circles in A and B) are provided for the projection of backgrounds. The placement of television and motion picture cameras (TV and Film) is planned for all three halls. To avoid congestion, traffic (T) is routed to and from each theater separately, from different sides.



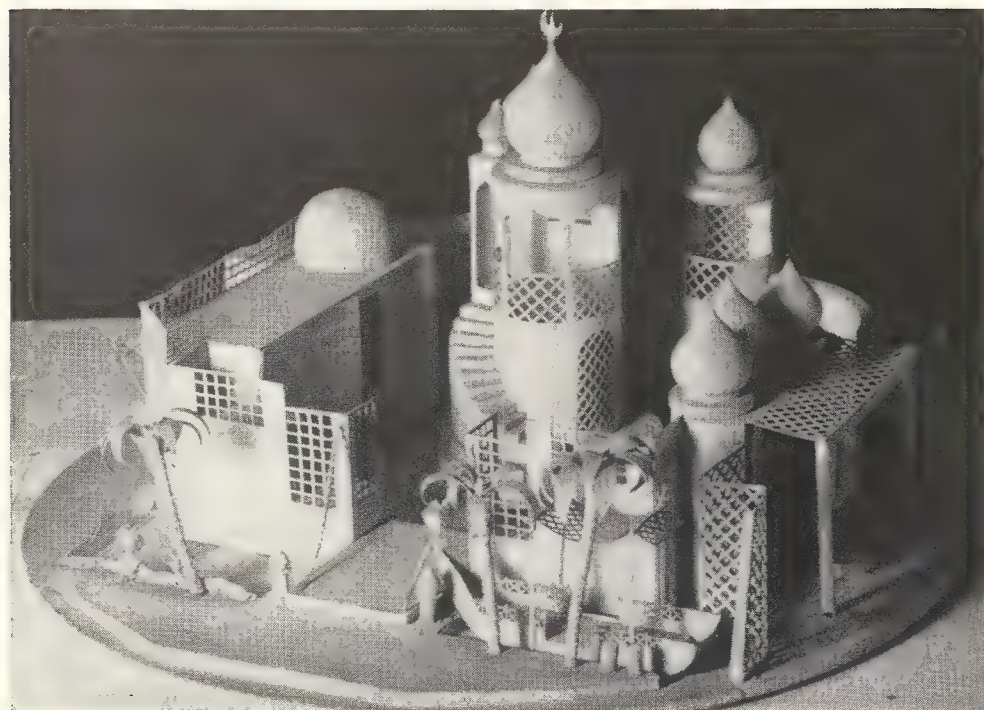
PLATE 98

JULIO PRIETO

Faust's studio, designed for a revolving stage by Julio Prieto, with the Frankfurt skyline of the preceding scene silhouetted behind

Ludwig Sievert's revolving stage set for *The Abduction from the Seraglio*

PLATE 99





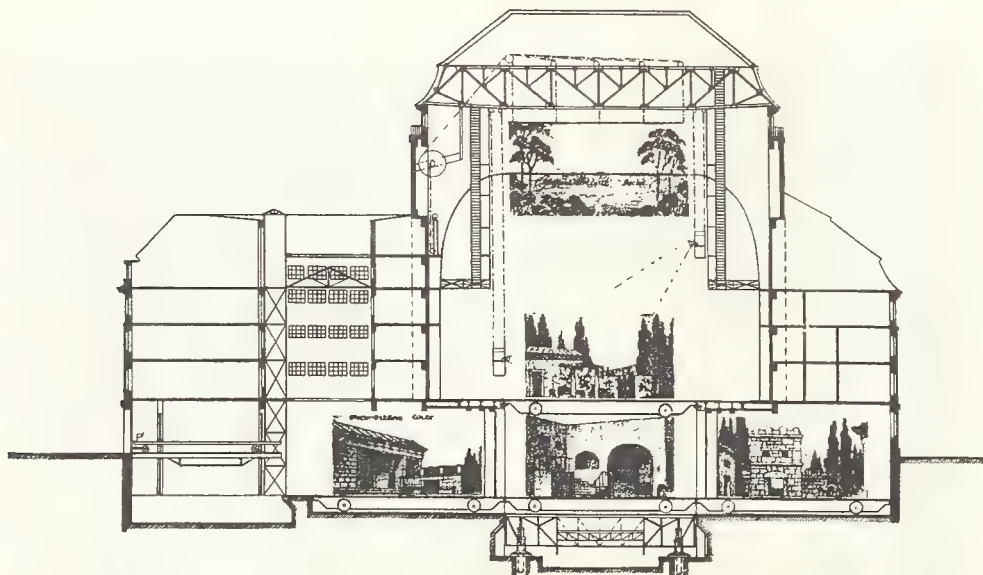
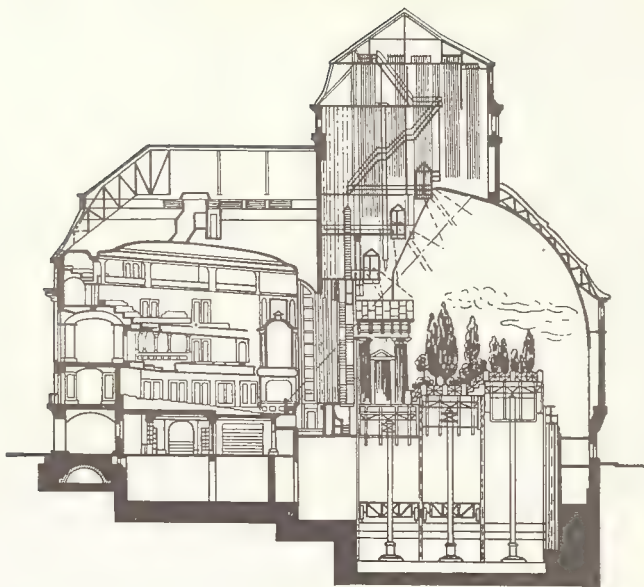


PLATE 100

# Wagon and elevator stages

From Friedrich Kranich, *Die Buehnentechnik der Gegenwart*, Berlin, 1933





PLATE 101

CASPAR NEHER

Projected scenery: In Caspar Neher's setting for the banquet scene in Verdi's *Macbeth* (above) only the floor, railing, and furniture are built; Paul Planer's picture of Valhalla in *Das Rheingold* (below) is entirely projected.

PLATE 102

PAUL PLANER

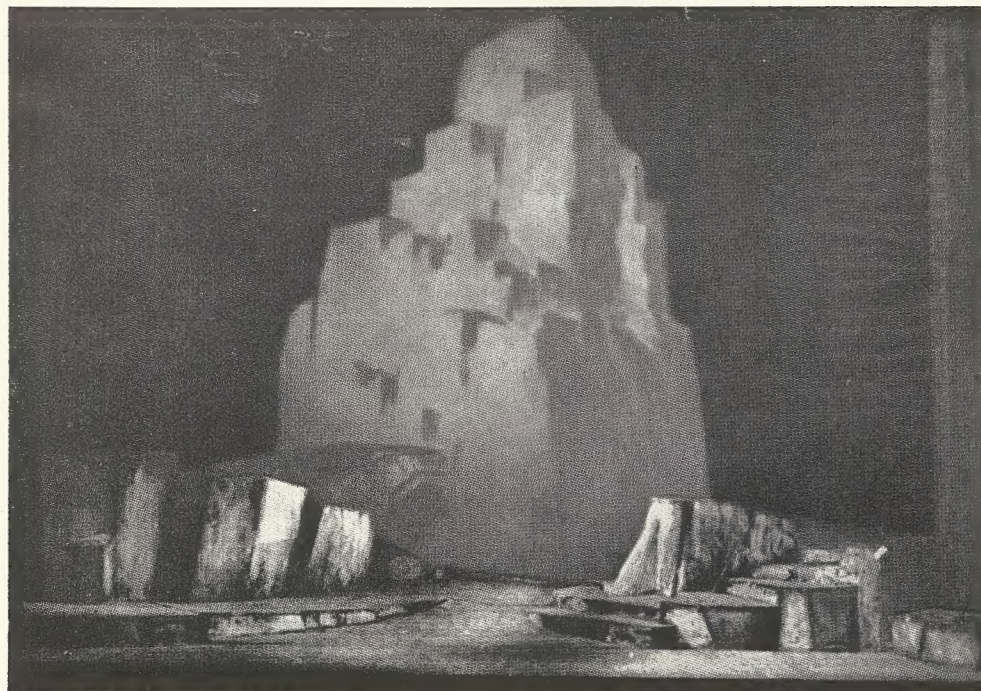




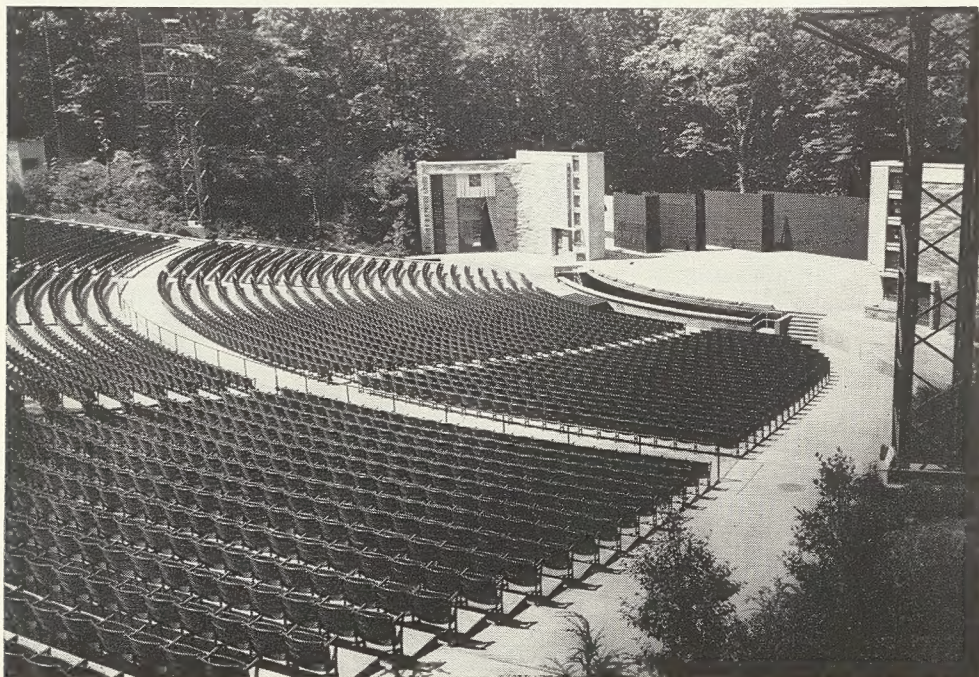


PLATE 103

BURNHAM HOYT

The Red Rocks outdoor theater near Denver, Colorado  
 The Sesquicentennial Amphitheater, Washington, D.C., built for  
 Paul Green's *Faith of Our Fathers*, 1950

PLATE 104







Courtesy Norman Bel Geddes.

Drawing by Norman Bel Geddes for the final scene of "Pelleas and Melisande."

## He Prefers the Vernacular

OPERA FOR THE PEOPLE. By Herbert Graf. Illustrated. 289 pp. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. \$5.

By HOWARD TAUBMAN

**S**ON of a Viennese music critic, Herbert Graf came to the United States in 1934 to be stage director for a season of opera in Philadelphia. Several years later he began to stage operas at the Metropolitan, deciding at the same time to make America his home. Since then he has kept his eyes, ears and mind open, has traveled and worked in many places in the United States and, since the end of the war, has spent summers abroad adding to his perspective. This volume is the fruit of his work, his observations and his thinking.

Graf believes that the time is ripe for opera to become the interest and affection of most Americans. He does not base this conviction on hope but on the widespread, if modest, activity in the field that has sprung up all across the country. He has not merely heard about community and college efforts in opera but has seen some of them in operation.

He is aware of developments on Broadway; since he is not hidebound by definitions, he realizes that such musical works as "Oklahoma!", "Allegro" and "South Pacific" are forms of American folk opera. He knows what is going on in television studios and in the movie houses. And he has a clear notion of what the role of a theatre like the Metropolitan might be—a kind of national showplace for

opera, he says—in relation to dozens of small theatres across the land.

Being a practical man of the theatre—and a self-critical one, for he is willing to admit his own mistakes—Graf knows how to give the reader an understanding of what goes on behind the scenes. He analyzes the factors that make for good opera librettos, and then goes on to discuss the function of the music. He is for opera in the vernacular. He has seen that conventional phrases set to music may prove a disturbing factor to American audiences. While he is willing to make concessions to public taste, he stresses the fact that "opera is fundamentally unreasonable" but indicates that the more important point is that opera has the power "to interpret human emotions on their highest level."

**I**N his survey of the operatic situation in America he examines the various kinds of sponsorship available thus far. He discusses what happens in rehearsal, the training of artists and the buildings in which opera is produced.

Graf's book should prove of great value to American communities which are contemplating a leap into opera or are expanding current programs of modest dimensions. It has facts and figures, and its illustrations are useful as well as illuminating. Most of all, this book should prove an inspiration to Americans who have sold their institutions short. Here is a European-turned-American who believes in America's future—realistically as well as affectionately.

Mr. Taubman is music editor of THE TIMES. Dec 9-'51



